



IN THE TABLOID: STYLE

THE WRONG TROUSERS - AVOID THEM

IN THE TABLOID: 8 PAGES OF MESS

THE LIGHTNING SLICK GONE HOME TO FOOTBALL

NEWS PAGE 10

THE NEW POWER ARRANGERS



The new power arrangers: Clare Short, Marjorie Mowlam, Robin Cook and Harriet Harman, Chris Smith and Frank Dobson arriving for the first Labour Cabinet meeting in 18 years Photographs: David Rose

Cabinet of hope and hard work

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Tony Blair and the Cabinet yesterday agreed the first Queen's Speech instalment of a radical new Labour agenda for Britain, and kept yet another promise by deciding to forego this year's Cabinet pay rise.

But the Prime Minister's office confirmed yesterday's exclusive *Independent* report that there would be no early legislation on open government. Action on cigarette advertising and a reform of the financing of political parties could also be stalled.

Having reminded Cabinet colleagues that the pledges made in the campaign would be at the heart of the Government programme, Mr Blair said: "There is hope and optimism out there; hard work to be done in here."

The Cabinet, which broke with tradition and called each other by first names rather than by ministerial title, agreed the Queen's Speech legislative package that will take the new government through to the autumn

on next year. The full speech will be delivered at the State Opening of Parliament on Wednesday.

While the Prime Minister's office refused to confirm speculation that the package would contain about 20 Bills, there will be two Bills on education, one on health, another on crime and disorder, and another on the reforms to the Bank of England announced by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer on Tuesday, along with an early Bill to set up the referendum on Scottish and Welsh devolution.

John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, said in Downing Street after the Cabinet had ended that he was very proud of the Queen's Speech.

"It reflects all those priorities - that of education, crime and jobs, decentralisation and devolution," he said.

"I am looking forward to implementing that programme and showing that a different government can make a difference. And that is what our Queen's Speech will reflect."

The Cabinet agreement to forego

Queen's speech: the key legislation

Education Bills - To reduce class sizes for 5, 6, and 7 year-olds, raise standards and tackle underachievement. General Teaching Council to be established to raise the standing of the profession; stimulation of private finance for school renovation.

Health Bill - Reduction of bureaucracy surrounding internal market, aimed at diverting resources from administration into medical care.

Crime Bill - "Fast track" procedure to deal with persistent young offenders. Probable measures to ensure delinquent children's parents take responsibility; action against disruptive neighbours.

Finance Bill - Changes to the Bank of England, as announced by the Chancellor this week.

Referendum Bill - To set up two referendums, on a parliament and tax-raising powers for Scotland, and on a Welsh assembly. To be followed by full-scale devolution Bills on setting up a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly.

this year's pay rise had been promised by Mr Brown last February, when he denounced the excessive nature of the increase that had been awarded under the pay review body process.

Mr Blair will be taking an effective pay cut of just under 29 per cent - with a salary of £102,417 rather than the full £143,860 to which he is entitled. Cabinet members will follow his lead by taking an effective pay cut of over 15 per cent, taking £87,851, rather than the full £103,860 which they could draw. The full award will be taken, instead, from next April.

Mr Blair has also decided to set up a new policy unit at Number 10, for the moment headed by David Miliband, who worked in Mr Blair's office in Opposition. He is to be director of policy, but Mr Blair was said to be looking for an overall strategic director, with what one aide called "a melon-sized brain".

But the focus of much attention

during the day was on the commitment to open government that Mr Blair had enthused about only last year.

Following yesterday's *Independent* report that long-awaited legislation was to be delayed for another 18 months, with yet another White Paper to be published outlining Government views, there was confusion yesterday morning when Peter Mandelson, Minister without Portfolio, indicated that there might after all be legislation in the Queen's Speech.

Later, however, he told Sky News: "We have to bring forward a White Paper on it first of all. We can't just pull off some Bill from the shelf and introduce it straight away. But we're very committed to it."

That was not the view of Whitehall insiders, who said that Mr Mandelson was not at all committed to the legislation, described by one very senior source close to the Prime Minister as "the death of journalism".

The same source said there was no watering down of the commitment to legislation, but he said that ministers had been faced with two choices: either to enact the existing *Code of Practice on Access to Government Information*, or to spend time drawing up "meaningful" legislation.

In the meantime, he said, a Freedom of Information Unit would be set up under David Clark, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, in the Cabinet office.

Maurice Frankel, director of the Campaign for Freedom of Information, said: "If you give ministers two or three years to operate under the old rules, they will pick up bad habits which they will be reluctant to break."

Other question marks were also being raised last night over the Government's enthusiasm for the abolition of the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords, and although Mr Blair yesterday welcomed a report on food safety, it was noted that there was no timescale for the creation of a Food Standards Agency.

Leading article, page 19
Suzanne Moore, page 21
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Top Tories shy away from by-election

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

The Tories were facing the prospect of a further humiliating defeat and an increase in Labour's majority with a by-election in the normally safe Home Counties seat of Uxbridge, following the sudden death of Sir Michael Shersby, aged 64.

Friends of Michael Portillo were last night discounting any possibility of the former secretary of state for defence running in the by-election to enable him to enter the Conservative Party leadership race.

"You will have to drag someone to stand," said one of Mr Portillo's friends. "With the voters in their current mood, we are likely to lose it."

Sir Michael had held the seat since 1972, but last Thursday saw his majority slashed by Labour from 13,179 to just 724. His death at home, seven days after his narrow victory, added

to the Tory woes, reduced the total number of Conservative seats to 164 and increased Labour's majority to 178.

The threat of a further defeat by Labour is likely to put off other ex-cabinet ministers who lost their seats, such as Ian Lang, Michael Forsyth and Malcolm Rifkind.

The Tories are expected to try to hold off the by-election until the late summer.

That could revive the possibility of Chris Patten, the Governor of Hong Kong, seeking a return to Westminster, but his friends said after presiding at the hand-over of the colony to China, he was planning to spend the summer in France writing a book on the tiger economies of the Far East.

Bill Cash, the ardent Eurosceptic, may join the leadership contest to force a more hostile policy to be adopted by the eventual winner against a federal Europe.

He fuelled speculation that

he may stand, although he has no chance of winning.

Stephen Dorrell, the former secretary of state for health, announced yesterday that he would be taking his leadership campaign to Scotland and Wales, where the Tories were wiped out in the general election.

The other camps were also reporting a surge in demand by Tory members in Scotland and Wales for their parties to be revived, possibly by a shift of policy under a new leader to engage in the devolved parliaments.

Lord Archer, who is backing Peter Lilley's stand for the leadership, echoed demands among party members for a change in the leadership rules to allow the grass-roots supporters to have a say in the choice of a leader.

It is too late to change the outcome now, but he said the Tories would be "in the wilderness" for years, if they did not make changes for the future.

Obituary, page 18

tycoon gets 14 years for world's biggest fraud

Kim Sengupta

The world's biggest fraud trial ended yesterday in major controversy over Britain's legal aid system.

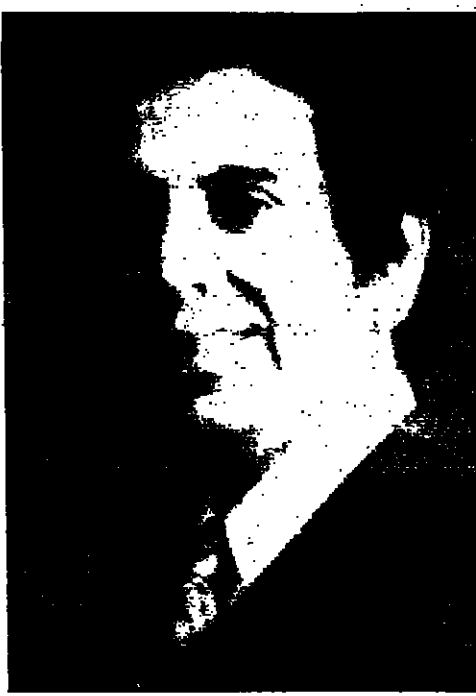
Abbas Gokal, convicted of a \$1.2bn (£740m) fraud involving the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, was jailed for 14 years, as well as being fined a record £2.9m - a sum the Old Bailey court is convinced he can pay from millions he has secreted away.

The judge, Mr Justice Buxton, also awarded costs of £4.3m against the disgraced Pakistani shipping magnate - although this ordered was stayed until his assets can be traced by the authorities.

However, the court heard that Gokal, 61, had received £4m of taxpayers' money on legal aid to fund his 125-day trial. Mr Justice Buxton said he was convinced Gokal had more than adequate funds to mount his own defence. However, he added that he would not pass any comment about the "appropriateness" of the legal aid board giving out money to Gokal.

Gokal was a close friend of Hassan Abedi, the late founder of BCCI. He was the biggest single borrower before banking authorities shut BCCI down in 1992 after discovering fraud amounting to \$20bn. The Serious Fraud Office in London is convinced that Gokal and his associates have at least £100m hidden in a web of foreign bank accounts and shell companies.

Anthony Hacking QC, for the prosecution, told the court that after his arrest at Frankfurt airport



Abbas Gokal: Jailed for 14 years after being convicted of a £1.2bn BCCI fraud

QUICKLY

IRA truce demanded
Tony Blair and John Bruton, the Irish PM, demanded a "quality" IRA truce before Sinn Féin can enter peace talks. Mo Mowlam, Northern Ireland Secretary, damped hopes that it could be admitted by 3 June, when the talks resume. Page 5

HRT under scrutiny
A study of women's health involving 1 million middle-aged Britons was launched to settle the argument about the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy. Page 5

That's entertainment
The Government is to start talks with BT on allowing it into entertainment broadcasting, following a promise that it would be allowed to compete with cable television in return for connecting hospitals, schools and libraries with the superhighway for free. Page 22

Tycoon gets 14 years for world's biggest fraud

Gokal had paid for German lawyers while extradition proceedings were going on. This continued until he arrived at Brixton prison in 1994. Mr Hacking said he was awarded legal aid in 1995 without the prosecuting authorities being consulted.

Awarding costs of £4.3m against Gokal the judge said he was not "prepared to let this matter pass". Gokal would, however, be expected to pay £2.9m on a confiscation order within two years. Failure to do so would lead to a further three-year jail term.

Sentencing Gokal, the judge said: "I am wholly satisfied that you are an intelligent, sophisticated and unscrupulous man, who put the interests of yourself and your family before all else."

Fraudster jailed, page 22

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significant shorts

Priest cleared of sexually abusing altar boys

A priest at the centre of altar boy sex abuse allegations was yesterday cleared by a jury of all 19 charges. Relatives and supporters of Father Edward Kilpatrick, 53, sobbed with joy after the jury foreman read out the "Not guilty" verdicts at the end of the 13-day trial at Armagh Crown Court. The cleric's two accusers, a 30-year-old civil servant, and a 32-year-old teacher who is a former student priest and a homosexual, were not in court to hear the verdicts. Fr Kilpatrick, a parish priest of Murlagh, Co Donegal, is a former diocesan secretary to the now-retired Bishop of Derry Dr Edward Daly. The allegations of gross indecency and indecent assault dated back more than 20 years to when he was a curate in Steelstown parish, Londonderry.

Plea to pay human egg donors

Egg donors should be paid up to £450 for helping childless couples, the head of a leading fertility clinic said yesterday. Professor Ian Craft, director of the London Gynaecology and Fertility Centre, said the current £15 fee plus travelling expenses allowed for donation was unrealistic in today's commercial world. Egg donation for financial reward is forbidden in Britain. However, some critics claim this has led to a serious shortage of donors. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which licenses clinics, intends to phase out all payments for egg donation.

Tyneside weapons haul

An Uzi machine-gun was among a haul of weapons displayed yesterday as the fruits of an anti-crime drive. The 51 firearms seized during Operation Rally in which police focused on known offenders on North Tyneside over the past nine months also included shotguns, pistols and rifles. Some 66 people being have been charged with a range of offences, involving robbery, violent disorder, drugs, theft and firearms. The commander of Tynemouth police, Superintendent Jon Stoddart, said the operation had been instrumental in reducing crime by a quarter in his district so far this year - and by 17 per cent across the whole force area.

Gucci lover denies cruelty



The mistress of the late fashion millionaire Paolo Gucci yesterday pleaded not guilty to causing unnecessary suffering to 13 Arab horses at his former estate, Penny Armstrong, 28, denied 13 charges involving animals at Millfield Farm, Rusper, West Sussex. The former stable girl appeared before Hove magistrates to deny 12 of the charges related to between 12 December 1996 and 2 January 1997, and another in December last year.

Teachers shall show humility

Teachers are being invited to obey a new code of values for their profession, including a commandment to admit they sometimes get things wrong. The set of ethical principles, the first of its kind to be devised for the education service, is based on two years' work by universities responsible for teacher training. Among the 11 commandments, published by the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, are four calling on teachers to exercise humility towards others, including their pupils. They are told to recognise their own fallibility and be willing to admit they may be "mistaken in respect of knowledge and of behaviour". A spokesman for the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers said teachers have one single commandment to offer: "Thou shalt listen to the voice of the classroom teacher." Lucy Ward

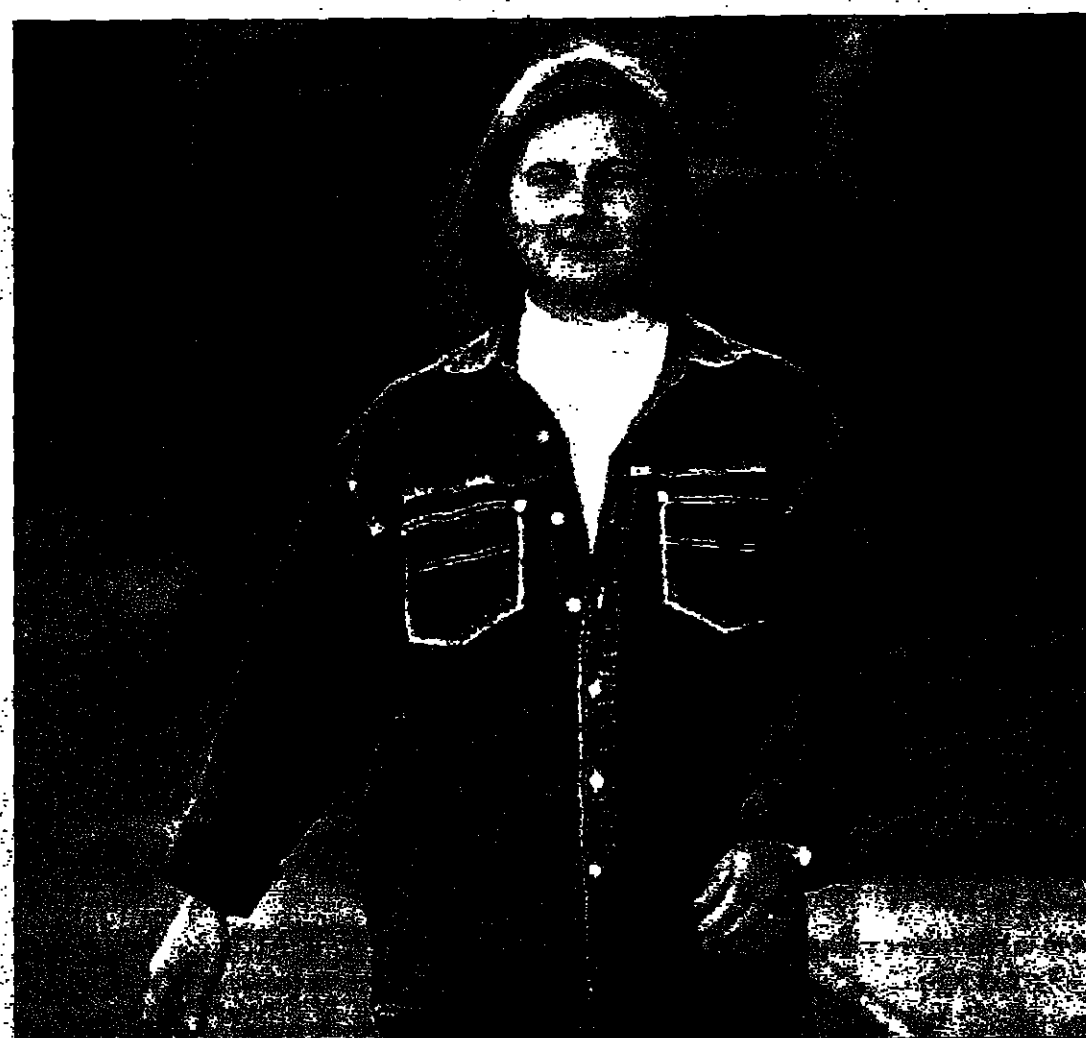
Smokers' weight gain explained

Smokers who kick the habit and then gain weight may do so because they have a lower level of a hormone which controls appetite, according to new research. Findings of a team based in Newcastle and Melbourne, Australia which are published in the latest issue of the *International Journal of Obesity* indicate that smokers have lower levels of leptin, which moderates hunger. Smoking makes the appetite centre in the brains of smokers more sensitive to leptin so their appetite is suppressed. When a person stops smoking the brain becomes less receptive to leptin so they eat more which often results in weight gain. Glenda Cooper

Nazi gold in German bank vault

A Jewish organisation yesterday called for a search of German bank vaults after it emerged that two Nazi-looted bars of gold were transferred to the Bank of England as recently as last September. The two bars were originally obtained by the Nazis in 1942 from the Bank of France where the Belgians had placed them for safe-keeping. The Deutsche Bundesbank found them last year and passed them to the Tripartite Gold Commission fund which was set up to oversee the return of the looted gold. Louise Jury

people



Jenny Hope: 'I hope things will be different and I can make a fresh start' (Photograph: PA)

Firefighter breaks the mould after sex harassment case

A woman firefighter yesterday took the highly unusual decision to return to her old job after winning compensation for sexual harassment. Jenny Hope, who accepted £5,000 in an out-of-court settlement, said she was subjected to offensive behaviour and ridicule after joining the Bedfordshire and Luton Fire Service. Objectable comments were made about her appearance and one male colleague even refused to speak to her, she said. Ms Hope, a 31-year-old mother of two, said she was apprehensive about returning to work, but had received support from other firefighters in Bedford and thought that people had learned from their mistakes. "I'm glad I've got the opportunity to go back. I hope things will be different and I can make a fresh start," she said. Ms Hope, who has been on sick leave for eight months, told her time in the service after joining two years ago. "I got the feeling that I wasn't wanted there because I was a woman. It seemed as if I had to justify myself all the time and in the end I lost my self-confidence. It went well beyond the normal banter you get in the fire service. It was unpleasant and I was angry and upset at the time. All I ever wanted was for it to stop so I could get on with my job of being a firefighter." Three firemen were given written warnings, sent on sex discrimination courses and moved to other fire stations following the complaints. She hoped that other women who found themselves in similar situations could see it was possible to take their case to an industrial tribunal and still return to their jobs. Brown Jenkins, of trade union solicitors Thompsons, said it was unusual for a woman in such a case to return to work. "Normally they suffer double jeopardy - sex discrimination and losing their job." Ken Cameron, general secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, said he was delighted Ms Hope felt that she could go back to work. "By pursuing sexual harassment cases for members and negotiating proper equal opportunities procedures, we are beginning to change attitudes." Paul Brown, deputy chief fire officer, said the brigade admitted no liability in the case and said the settlement was "amicable and productive". Barrie Clement

Judge steps down with call for legal review

Judge Gerald Butler QC (right), one of Britain's most colourful and outspoken judges, retired yesterday with a call for a wide ranging overhaul of the legal system. The senior judge at Southwark Crown Court in London for the past 13 years, he asked for an inquiry into how juries make decisions and questioned whether judges needed to sum up cases at the end of a trial. Judge Butler, 66, has overseen a series of high profile cases, including those involving Liz Hurley, after she was mugged by a girl gang; pop star Sting, who memorably told how he "failed to notice" when his accountant siphoned off £690,000 from his current account as part of a multi-million pound fraud; TV comic Craig Charles, who was cleared of rape; and footballer Dennis Wise, who successfully appealed against a conviction for attacking a London cab driver. He is also the only judge in living memory to order the arrest of a barrister in open court following a heated clash of views. Addressing a gathering of barristers and judges at a formal farewell ceremony in his honour, he asked: "Why has there never been some inquiry and report as to what actually goes on in the jury room? If there were, we would discover if our directions of law are understood and followed. I for my part believe there would be quite a few shocks if there were that inquiry." He then questioned the need for judges to sum up at the end of cases, saying: "It has always seemed to me that is wholly unnecessary. All the jury need to be given are directions as to the law." Judge Butler, who lists his interests in *Who's Who* as rugby, opera, Japanese pottery and walking, was called to the Bar in 1955 and moved on to the Bench in 1977 as a crown court Recorder. Five years later he was appointed a circuit judge, and in 1984 became senior judge at Southwark. Lord Justice Auld, senior presiding judge in England and Wales, praised Judge Butler's "intellectual authority and robust common sense".



Heart operation for Heseltine

Michael Heseltine, the former deputy prime minister, who was admitted to hospital with heart trouble last weekend, underwent surgery yesterday to widen the arteries supplying blood to his heart. The operation, known as an angioplasty, was carried out at the private Harley Street Clinic in London. In a brief statement last night, Dr Brian Mawhinney, the Tory party chairman, said the surgery had been a success. "He is resting comfortably and hopes to go home in a few days," he said. The operation indicates that Mr Heseltine's condition is more serious than simple fatigue caused by the rigours of the election campaign. He had a heart attack in 1993 while on holiday in Venice but always insisted it was only a minor attack from which he had fully recovered. Mr Heseltine underwent an angiogram earlier this week, in which radio-opaque dye was injected into his heart which must have revealed a blockage. The angioplasty, which was necessary to clear it, involves threading a wire carrying a tiny balloon through the artery in the groin up to the heart. The balloon is then inflated, stretching the narrowed artery, before being withdrawn to allow the blood to flow. Mr Heseltine withdrew from the Tory leadership race last Saturday, having been the bookies' favourite.

briefing

TRANSPORT

Traffic increase puts more pressure on motorways

Britain's packed motorways are growing ever more busy, according to Government figures released yesterday. Motorway traffic grew 3.9 per cent last year and these roads are now carrying more vehicles than other trunk routes, even though they make up only a quarter of the trunk road system. The Department of Transport statistics for 1996 also showed that overall motor traffic increased by 2.7 per cent. Towards the end of their term in office, the Conservatives were moving away from the idea of building more roads to cope with traffic growth. Instead, they were concentrating more on schemes to make better use of existing highways, including many widening schemes, and trying to encourage more use of public transport. The new Government is committed to an even more vigorous policy of "greening up" transport and promoting alternatives to the car.

HEALTH

Upsurge in abortions continues

Abortions were still rising nearly a year after the 1995 scare over the contraceptive pill, according to the latest figures released by the Office for National Statistics. Between June and September last year there was a rise of 2,721 abortions for women resident in England and Wales, or 7.1 per cent, compared with the same period in the previous year. In total, 41,162 terminations were carried out. The British Pregnancy Advisory Service, the main provider of abortion services outside the NHS, said it had seen an increase of 10.4 per cent over this period and warned it would take some time before numbers settled and returned to the steady decline that was evident before the Pill scare in October 1995. "Many women remain unsettled and unsure about using the Pill, they need time to become confident again and importantly they need access to information which helps them understand exactly what the CSM announcement meant to them," said Carol Roberts, spokeswoman for BPAS. "Until women's confidence in the contraceptive pill returns, they will continue to use less effective methods of contraception and therefore increase their risk of getting pregnant." Glenda Cooper

SOCIETY

Single life for homeowners

The number of single people buying homes and living alone has almost trebled in 18 years, according to a survey published yesterday. A reduction in the amount of good quality homes for rent could partly explain the increase, said the Department of Environment. Figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that the numbers had risen from 370,000 in 1977-78 to 1 million in 1995-96. Younger people were said to be behind the increase, and the figures showed there were more than six times as many owner-occupiers aged under 45, who had never married, than in 1977-78. Alan Holmans, a contributor to the report, said: "The sheer number of single men, and to a lesser extent women, is behind the changes. And in parts of the country where house prices are lower, there are more owning and fewer renting." The third report of the Survey of English Housing, based on interviews in 20,000 private households, also showed that 200,000 households took in lodgers.



WEATHER

Cold truth about warmer climes

Cold snaps can be a fatal bad news for hot-blooded Italians and Greeks, according to a study which shows that death rates in warm countries rise faster as temperatures drop than they do in chillier regions. This is because people used to the heat forget to wrap up when the weather gets cold and do not heat their homes properly, it is suggested. Researchers led by Professor WR Keatinge, from Queen Mary and Westfield College, London, investigated the link between death rate and temperature change in different parts of Europe. The areas studied were northern Finland, southern Finland, south-western Germany, the Netherlands, London, northern Italy, Athens, and Palermo in Sicily. Death rates for most regions were at their lowest when daily temperatures were around 18C (64.4F). The death rates then rose with each 1C drop in temperature, with the biggest increases seen in places that had mild winters. In southern Finland, where the average winter temperature was -1C, mortality increased by 0.27% for each 1C fall from 18C. But in Athens, where winters average 12.7C, the average mortality increase for each 1C fall from 18C was 2.15%.

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Our ante-natal babysitter, by the parents of surrogate triplets



Delighted: Julie and Anthony Cohn Photograph: PA

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

It was a matching of opposites: the grandmother and the childless pair; the surgeon and the pub cook; the Orthodox Jewish couple and the Gentle mother.

But yesterday Julie and Anthony Cohn could not contain their gratitude for Anne Keep, the 41-year-old who acted as the surrogate mother of their triplets Albert, George and Henry. "I believed some wonderful thing would happen and it has," said Mr Cohn.

"We didn't think we would ever find anyone as wonderful and giving as superb and selfless as Anne," said Mrs Cohn. "She is completely full of goodness and love."

Mrs Keep who has three grandchildren of her own acted as "ante-natal babysitter" after being put in touch with the Cohns through

Cots (Childlessness Overcome Through Surrogacy), which puts childless couples and surrogates together.

Overcoming odds of 1000-1, the triplets were conceived after doctors implanted two eggs taken from Mrs Cohn and fertilised with her husband's sperm. In Mrs Keep's womb, one of the eggs split into identical twins.

The children were born in hospital in Birmingham in March, weighing between two and three pounds each, but have doubled in weight after moving to the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead, north-west London. Yesterday they gurgled and cried as they hugged their tiny teddy bears.

Speaking for the first time since the birth the Cohns said they had struck up an instant rapport with Mrs Keep and would be keeping in close touch "for the rest of their

lives". Mrs Cohn, a 27-year-old lecturer who was born without a womb, said: "We have learnt so much from her about giving and about selflessness. She is a fantastic woman."

Mrs Keep was paid expenses. Commercial surrogacy was banned in Britain after Kim Cotton, Britain's first surrogate mother to go public, was paid £5,500 in 1985 to have a baby for an infertile couple.

The Cohns said they felt moral critics of surrogacy were unfair and failed to understand the plight of the childless couple. "The only surrogacy we really know about is the one we went through," said Mr Cohn. "It was such a wonderful experience and has been such a positive thing. It has given us something we would never have been able to have otherwise."

His wife added: "It's unfair for people to comment on moral

grounds if they haven't gone through it. Anne is a person who has given so much. If anyone looked at our last year-and-a-half, they would see we have no qualms whatsoever."

Surrogacy and fertility treatment have been a vexed question in the Jewish community for some time. For the Orthodox, Jewishness is transmitted only through biological mothers. But it is not clear from traditional Jewish teaching whether a mother is the woman whose egg grows into a baby, or the woman whose womb nourishes it, if the two roles are separated as they are here.

Fraybin Gottlieb, assistant registrar at the London Beth Din, the court of the Chief Rabbi, said yesterday: "It is a very sensitive issue... and one on which there are various opinions. There is no one single religious ruling either in this country or abroad."



Surrogate: Anne Keep, 41, who gave birth in March

The big question a computer cannot ask: Is Kasparov making the wrong moves?

William Hartson

What is Garry Kasparov playing at in New York? After four games of his chess match against the IBM computer, Deep Blue, he has scored a win, a loss and two draws. He should have drawn the game he lost - indeed, his game could still have been saved in the final position when he resigned - and he held a clear advantage in both drawn games. At the end of the fourth game yesterday, Kasparov said: "I believe it was a win... but I was tired and I couldn't figure it out."

Is this really the man who has spread terror throughout the chess world for the past 12 years? Did Garry Kasparov ever resign a drawn position against Anatoly Karpov? Was he ever too tired to figure out how to beat Nigel Short? Two theories have emerged to explain Kasparov's unconvincing form in the match so far.

The rational explanation is that the world champion is finding it extremely difficult to adjust to the unfamiliar problems posed by a computer opponent. Human beings tend to miscalculate in tactically complex positions. When a position explodes into a sudden turmoil of possible captures, checks and brutal threats, the human mind turns to mush. But that is exactly where computers are at their strongest.

It is relatively simple for a programmer to instruct his machine to look at every possible sequence of captures and checks, and thinking at some 250 million moves a second, you can be fairly sure that Deep Blue will have sorted

ed out all the tactics by the time Kasparov has written down his previous move on the score sheet.

When there are no tactical opportunities, however - in blocked positions for example, or where the White and Black pieces have yet to meet in hand-to-hand combat - computers can only stumble through billions of possibilities, hoping that something good turns up.

In both the third and fourth games of this match, Deep Blue played some atrociously pointless, or gratuitously weakening moves when it did not un-

When a position explodes, the human mind turns to mush

derstand what was happening, but once Kasparov developed direct threats, it found the perfect defences to counter them. Humans, when they start playing badly, generally have the good grace to continue doing so. Facing such a mixture of mindlessness and perfection is enough to throw anyone off balance.

But for anyone determined to reject so logical an explanation, there is a bizarre theory that has been advocated by some suspicious chess followers in the darker corners of the Internet. Just suppose a world chess champion

was challenged to a \$1m match by a large computer company. If he gave it too sound a thrashing, he would win the prize, but it would not come back for more.

The result of last year's match between Kasparov and Deep Blue turned out to be perfect for all concerned. Deep Blue won one game, which led to unparalleled publicity for its makers as well as encouraging them to believe their programming was on the right lines. There were two draws in the middle of the match, which sustained interest to the very end, then Kasparov ran away at the end with two contemptuously easy victories. The perfect plot. And the first four games this time have followed an identical pattern.

Has Kasparov been pulling his punches? Is he just toying with Deep Blue, in the knowledge that he can dispatch it to the junk yard whenever he chooses?

No, of course he isn't. But if he wins the last two games of the match, proponents of the alternative theory will take it as strong evidence for their case.

But there is a far stronger piece of evidence pointing to the opposite conclusion: if the expression on Kasparov's face was anything other than genuine anguish while he was being pushed around by Deep Blue in the second game, then he is an even better actor than he is a chessplayer. He is, on his usual form, a good enough player to polish off Deep Blue this weekend and take the \$700,000 winner's purse. And next year IBM will surely be back for more.



Quiet game: TV screens showing Garry Kasparov as he ponders his next move against IBM's Deep Blue

Photograph: AP

news

Failing British sit-coms in search of new Friends



In the can: A scene from *Steptoe and Son* (left), from *Friends*, and the sit-com artist par excellence, Tony Hancock



Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

Has Anyone Seen My Pussy? could only be a Channel 4 documentary. This one is about the use of innuendo in the British

situation comedy and is the centrepiece to a weekend-long celebration of the much-maligned television genre to be shown at the end of this month. It will look at how the sit-com has developed and changed

over the years and will also examine the influence of America's massive output of sit-coms. A series of mini-sit-coms using the British alternative comedians Matt Lucas and Bob Mortimer will parody the US brand

of formula sit-com in shows called *My Gay Dads* and *I'm Bland Yet All My Friends Are Crazy*. Stuart Cosgrove, Channel 4's controller of arts and entertainment, believes the

weekend is timely because of debate about the merits of British and American sit-coms and the popularity of shows such as *Friends* and *Frasier*.

He believes the success of US imports comes down to familiarity. He said: "Because sit-coms are about characters, they take time to work. People need to get to know the characters and their catch-phrases. Shows like *Only Fools and Horses* and *One Foot in the Grave* took until their third series to really take off."

"So while *Father Ted* is very much an authored work, written by two people, *Friends* is part of a Los Angeles sit-com industry and has 34 writers. That means you have eight episodes of *Father Ted* a year compared with 36 episodes a year of *Friends*. That in turn means US sit-coms can become familiar with the audience and take off very quickly."

This is one explanation, he believes, why the US's prime-time schedules are dominated by sit-coms, while it is drama and soaps that dominate in the UK. There, he says, they have made the investment in sit-

com, while here comedy budgets are being attracted to cheaper comedy game-show formats like *Have I Got News For You*.

A further difference was that here most critically acclaimed sit-coms had moved out of peak time to after the 9pm watershed. Only *One Foot in the Grave* and repeats of *Only Fools and Horses* remain in the centre of the mainstream.

Mr Cosgrove feels this is a function of British comedy writers turning their back on the cosy *Terry and June*-style suburban sit-com world.

"The closest to that form we have now is *One Foot in the Grave*," said Mr Cosgrove. "And it is very different."

"It is never explicitly stated, but the couple have lost a child at some time in the past and it is as if they are just waiting to die. There is a much darker melancholy permeating the show than in traditional comedies."

Mr Cosgrove believes that the BBC's early Eighties hit *The Young Ones* marked a major sea-change in the kind of sit-com writers wanted to create.

"The *Young Ones* decon-

structed the rules of the sit-com with time-warps, people walking through walls and bands playing in the middle of the living room. *Father Ted* wouldn't exist without it - it is *The Young Ones* in a seminary.

"But it has to be remembered that the classic, timeless sit-coms, like *Steptoe and Son*, were never just the bour-

geoisie in their living-rooms." *Has Anyone Seen My Pussy?* explores how, by moving to later in the evening, sit-com writers could stop saying coconuts when they meant to say tits and how *The Young Ones* helped introduce a more up-front language that is used by shows like *Men Behaving Badly* or *Absolutely Fabulous*.

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Nuclear plant ordered to stop reprocessing

Nicholas Schoon

In an unprecedented move, Scotland's green watchdog yesterday ordered an immediate halt of a radioactive waste processing operation at the Dounreay nuclear plant on safety grounds.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (Sepa) said AEA Technology, the formerly state-owned firm running the operation, was not able to accurately monitor levels of radioactivity in gases and liquids discharged into the sea and air from the new, purpose-built plant in Caithness.

The waste in question is highly-volatile sodium, and it comes from Germany. Molten sodium is used as a coolant inside fast breeder reactors but it becomes radioactive as a result. AEA Technology is contracted to convert several dozen tonnes of the resulting contaminated sodium into a safer, less radioactive form using chemical treatments which turn it into salt and water.

This processing operation produces gasses and liquids with very low levels of radioactivity which are discharged into

the sea and air. In issuing a legally binding prohibition notice the environment protection agency, an arm of government, also said it had doubts about the declared levels of radioactivity in the 86 tonnes of imported sodium.

The large Dounreay site is shared between the privatised AEA and the state-owned UK Atomic Energy Authority, both used to part of the same organisation.

A spokesman for AEA Technology said the agency's action arose out of information it had provided to the regulator. "We were surprised at this reactor to our full and fair disclosure... we believe we can comply with all of the agency's requirements."

Sepa also believes that the importation of contaminated sodium may not have complied with laws covering waste imports. It says it is considering a prosecution.

AEA Technology says the shipments had been cleared by the German authorities, the Scottish Office and HM Industrial Pollution Inspectorate, when the contracts were arranged two years ago.

Blacked-up child sweeps 'snubbed' by Blue Peter

The children's programme *Blue Peter* has been accused of "political correctness gone mad" after an editor refused to film children dressed as chimney sweeps because they had blacked-up faces.

They were taking part in the Bank Holiday Rochester Sweeps Festival in Kent, an event started in the 18th century to celebrate May Day.

Children in the Medway town had joined Morris dancers at the festival, which was immortalised by Charles Dickens in *Sketches By Boz*.

But a BBC crew from *Blue Peter* who were supposed to film the children refused after they saw their blackened faces.

Blue Peter editor Oliver Macfarlane said: "I was concerned that showing people with artificially blacked-up faces might be misunderstood and cause offence to some members of our audience."

"We did ask to film a group of other children dressed as Morris dancers but permission was refused. We are sorry to disappoint those children who expected to be filmed."

Tony Stalker, who had gone to watch the popular event,

said: "This is political correctness gone mad."

"Everyone knows the black faces of the sweeps represents just the soot. *Blue Peter* should not read things into something that is just not there."

A spokeswoman for Rochester City Council, which organises the festival, said: "*Blue Peter* did express an interest in taking part in the Rochester Sweeps Festival but to our disappointment decided to cancel their visit."

She added: "*Blue Peter*'s decision obviously disappointed not just the council, but also the groups continuing the tradition of the dancing sweeps and individuals who were prepared to give up their time to help with filming."

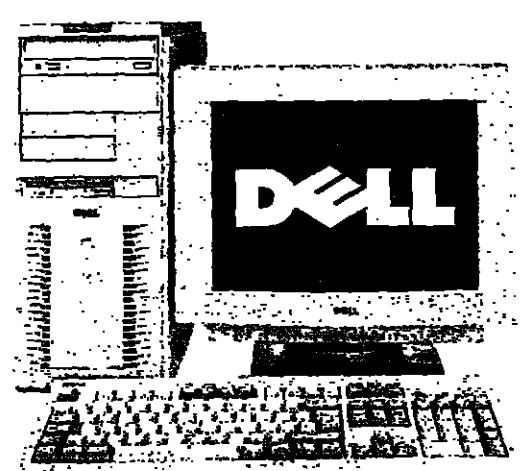
"The event was covered by other TV crews who had no reservations about coming."

The council said the children had taken their inspiration from contemporary pictures of 19th century sweeps and descriptions by Dickens, who lived in Rochester during his last years. The event died out at the turn of the century but was revived by the City Council in the 1980s as a tourist attraction.

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queen's speech proposals

Education forms the centrepiece of

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Two education Bills will form the "centrepiece" of the Queen's Speech programme for the forthcoming parliamentary year. After the first meeting of the new Cab-

inet yesterday, the Prime Minister's Office said one education Bill would deal with class sizes. Because it would be short and specific, that might be expected to be through to the Statute Book by the end of the year. The second education Bill would be about educational standards and what the

spokesman said would be a "the most far-reaching attack ever made on under-achievement in schools." It would include creation of a General Teaching Council, to raise the standing and morale of the profession; measures to deal with failing teachers, schools and education authorities;

and a stimulation of private finance for school renovation. There will also be legislation to get rid of some of the bureaucratic apparatus attached to the internal market in the NHS, action Labour hopes will help divert resources from administration into front-line

medical care. Early legislation is promised to accelerate the way in which persistent young offenders are dealt with by the criminal justice system. That Home Office legislation is also expected to include action to ensure parents of delinquent children face up to their responsibilities, and action

against noisy and disruptive neighbours. The Queen's Speech will also include legislation to enact changes to the Bank of England, announced by Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, this week. A start on the promised welfare-to-work programme will be made in next month's Budget.

Quick end to assisted places

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

Two education Bills – one short and sharp, one more substantial – will be announced in the Queen's Speech next week.

The first Bill, to be moved on to the statute book as soon as possible, will deal with Labour's plans to abolish the assisted places scheme and use the cash to bring down primary school class sizes.

The Government is acting quickly in order to prevent independent schools making offers of assisted places for the 1998-9 academic year. All places already awarded will be honoured, but the money saved as the scheme is phased out will be used to ensure class sizes are no higher than 30 for five-, six- and seven-year-olds.

A White Paper to be published in June will address the core of Labour's education policy, centring on measures to raise standards in schools.

It will include moves to underpin planned improvements in literacy and numeracy to meet ambitious targets.

There will also be proposals for tackling failing schools and local education authorities, paving the way for Labour's "fresh start" policy under which inadequate schools would be closed and reopened under new leadership. The White Paper will also contain proposals for a general teaching council intended to help raise teachers' professional status.

The Bill, due in the autumn, will end grant-maintained status in schools and create a new

"foundation" status offering similar freedoms to those enjoyed by church schools.

There are also likely to be measures linked to Labour's plans to boost lifelong learning and training.

Moves to abolish the nursery voucher scheme are already underway and do not require legislation.

Meanwhile, cash will be found to fill a £69m "black hole" in this year's budget for further education, colleges will be told.

Further education and sixth form colleges feared they might not receive government funding they are owed for extra courses provided this term and last over and above their agreed workload.

The last government, after saying earlier this year it would not pay for the work, relented under pressure but failed to say where the money would come from before being voted out of office.

Now colleges, which are already under severe financial strain and are facing budget cuts from September, will have their £69m bill met using contingency cash from the Department for Education and Employment budget for 1997-8.

Department sources said the money had already been passed to the colleges quango, the Further Education Funding Council, ready for payment. The FEFC will contribute the remaining £15m of £85m earned by colleges since new year for unexpected expansion.

The decision provides no long-term comfort for a sector facing a £115m cut in its funding in the next academic year.



Street talk: John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, addressing journalists in Downing Street after the new government's first Cabinet meeting

Photograph: David Rose

Minimum wage promise to be fulfilled

Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

One of the key policies which will set apart the new government from the previous administration will be the establishment of a statutory minimum wage.

The Queen's Speech next Wednesday will set out plans for the creation of a Low Pay Com-

mission, under the chairmanship of an independent labour market expert.

Among the 15 commissioners will be representatives of both employers' and employees' organisations, especially those representing sectors where pay is comparatively low.

The Commission will be expected to take into account economic circumstances and

the need for the eradication of "poverty pay" in arriving at a figure. The establishment of a statutory minimum will be denounced as inflationary and likely to cause job losses by the Tory opposition.

It is hoped a recommendation on the rate will be made before the end of the year and that the new statutory minimum will come into operation in 1998.

The Speech will make clear that the wage will apply to all

employees, whether full or part-time, temporary or casual and whether they work from home. There will be no regional or sectoral rates.

Ian McCartney, Trade and Industry Minister, is also known to be keen that the rate should also apply to the long-term unemployed who take advantage of a new community work programme.

It is expected that the minimum – backed by a range of financial sanctions against

employers who pay workers below the statutory level – will be struck between £3 and £3.50 an hour.

The Labour Party calculates that £3bn of taxpayers' money is used to subsidise low wages through the payment of "in-work" benefits.

While the biggest unions are calling for a minimum set at half male median earnings – calculated at £4.26 an hour – the TUC has set its sights lower at around £4.

Ken Jackson, general secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, warned this week at his union's annual conference in Jersey that the rate should not be too high for fear of sending a "shockwave" through the economy.

Mr Jackson stressed that his members – mostly skilled workers on relatively high wages – would seek to maintain their pay differentials over lower-paid colleagues.

Super-ministry takes shape

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

Confusion about the structure of the combined Departments of Environment, Transport and the Regions remained high as ministers were allocated their responsibilities yesterday.

In particular, pressure groups and others affected by the work of the departments are unclear about which department will gain precedence over the other and whether a full merger is eventually envisaged.

Yesterday, John Prescott, in charge of the new combined ministry, told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme that as yet there were no immediate plans to merge the two, which were

united as one department throughout the 1970s, having been brought together by Ted Heath's government and separated by Margaret Thatcher's.

However, he left the door open to the possibility saying: "I have inherited two departments that have been operating separately and in some cases not even talking to each other, for a long time. Integrating the thinking, bringing them together, getting a structure of political decision-making is my first priority."

However, Mr Prescott declined to commit himself on integration, asking to be given "at least up to the summer to begin to make sure that we have got the right decisions."

He faces some tough ones as the transport crisis is likely to become exacerbated as a result of cuts in the road programme and a hiatus in rail investment.

There are inherent conflicts between the two departments. Under the previous system, the Department of the Environment used to have a team monitoring the work of the Department of Transport and insiders say that this type of duplication will no longer be necessary if the two departments are working together.

Transport groups are reassured by the fact that the Department of Transport has a minister, Gavin Strang, in addition to Mr Prescott in the Cabinet, while Michael Meacher, Mr

Prescott's number two in Environment, is not. However, Transport has only been given one junior minister in the Commons – Glenda Jackson, who consequently has a fearsome workload which includes London and integrated transport policy.

By contrast, Environment has four Commons ministers – Nick Raynsford, Angela Eagle, Richard Caborn and Hilary Armstrong – in addition to Messrs Prescott and Meacher.

However, environmental groups are keen to see integration. Lynn Sloman, deputy director of Transport 2000 said: "It's not a matter of the two departments just being brought together. You have to integrate their policies."

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queen's speech proposals

Labour's ambitious new programme

But as much attention will be paid at Westminster to the legislation that had been firmly expected - or trailed - but which was being damped down by the Prime Minister's Office last night.

Apart from the about-turn on freedom of information, it was said that a reference would be made to the Nolan Committee

on Standards in Public Life about party political financing, with no early Bill, and that a ban on tobacco advertising would fall into the same category as freedom of information - no action for another 18 months.

It was unclear last night whether a food agency would be included in the Queen's

Speech, although expectations were raised when the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said in a statement: "The public has the right to expect the very highest standards of good safety."

"Confidence in the safety of the food we eat has been severely undermined in recent years and I am determined to re-

build that trust." Mr Blair said that a food standards agency was needed, but no target was set for its creation.

Instead, the Prime Minister said that David Clark, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the Cabinet Office, would chair a new ministerial group on food safety "to take forward these proposals."

He added: "In the interim, Dr Jack Cunningham, the Minister for Agriculture, has already acted to ensure greater openness in the working practices of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and more responsiveness to the needs of the public."

Opening his first Cabinet, Mr Blair

reminded his colleagues that they had been elected on a New Labour ticket, and that they should govern as New Labour.

The pledges in the manifesto contract had been at the heart of the election campaign, he said, and they would be at the heart of government action.



Royal touch: Workmen repairing the Sovereign's Gate in the Houses of Parliament in preparation for the Queen's entrance next Wednesday. Photograph: John Voos

Food safety brief switches to health

Glenda Cooper
Consumer Affairs Correspondent

Responsibility for food safety should be taken away from the Ministry of Agriculture and given to health ministers to prioritise consumer interests, according to a blueprint for a food safety agency.

The report, laid before the Prime Minister yesterday, calls for a strong and independent Food and Health Commission which would have wide-ranging powers to combat food scares.

Tony Blair promised that the new agency would be "open, transparent and act in the interests of consumers" and said that he would be setting up a ministerial group on food safety to consider the proposals drawn up at his request by Professor Philip James, director of the Rowett Research Institute in Aberdeen. Legislation is expected to be included in next week's Queen's Speech.

Professor James said it was a matter of urgency to restore confidence in the way

food problems were handled.

He said a target of three years should be set and that the new agency - which would have powers to act in all the recent food scares such as salmonella, E. coli and BSE as well as matters such as genetically modified food and pesticides - should report to Parliament through health rather than agriculture ministers. This would emphasise that its priority was the interests of consumers.

But he also recommended that other ministers, including the Minister of Agriculture, should be involved, in what he said was a new "axis" between Parliament and a public body.

It was essential that the agency had teeth if it was to be an effective watchdog and that would mean having regulatory powers, the professor added.

"It's clear from consultation we must have regulation. If you simply have an advisory group, given the concerns at the moment no one's going to think it's credible. You've got to be able to act," he said.

A period of about six weeks consultation is expected before plans are finalised. The structure of the agency would be a central commission of 10 food experts appointed by the Prime Minister or ministerial council. It would also include representatives from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

"We've set this up as a very powerful commission. Very high-powered scientists would be needed," said Professor James. "We're saying this is a commission which has to act on behalf of the public. This is not an anti-business commission. It must be clear and transparent."

Consumer groups welcomed the proposals. Ruth Evans, director of the National Consumer Council called it "a breath of fresh air after the secrecy within MAFF". And Tim Lang, professor of food policy at Thames Valley University, called the report a "milestone".

He said: "Consumers have been campaigning for a long time to have food regulation and promotion separated."

Private-finance hospitals head NHS priorities

Jeremy Laurence
Health Editor

Among the measures on the NHS likely to be included in the Queen's Speech, legislation to free the logjam of privately financed hospital projects tops the list.

Investors in projects such as the £173m Norfolk and Norwich hospital are holding back from giving the final go-ahead because of fears that NHS trusts may lack the legal power to enter the deals.

However, there are more fundamental worries about the viability of PFI deals in the NHS which have proved too expensive for some hospitals such as Guy's and St Thomas's where long-term commercial risks of redevelopment are high.

Labour ministers have examined the possibility of establishing a "health bank" - a non-governmental organisation which would raise funds to invest in hospitals.

The non-profit organisation could offer bonds, underwritten by government, to commercial investors or to local people wishing to invest in their local hospital on which they would earn a return. By attracting a wide range of investors the "bank" would spread the risk but the NHS would retain greater control over how the investment was used.

Legislation would also be required to realise Labour's pledge to end the NHS internal market and the two-tier system by altering contracting arrangements between GPs and hospitals. As part of its objective of reducing NHS bureaucracy, Labour plans to replace individual GP fundholders negotiating their own contracts with local commissioning for larger groups of GPs. In addition, Labour has inherited proposals for legislation to improve the care of the mentally ill and the training of dentists from the previous government.

political shorts

London hospital closures halted

No further hospitals will close in London until a review of health services in the capital has been completed, it emerged yesterday.

The moratorium, which fulfils a Labour manifesto pledge and brings a ray of hope for threatened hospitals such as St Bartholomew's and Guy's, was disclosed by Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, in an interview with his local paper, the *Hampstead and Highgate Express*, and later confirmed by the Department of Health.

He said no decisions would be made before completion of the review, expected by the end of the year.

But he appeared to pre-empt the review's findings by adding: "This government will not end up endorsing the previous Government's policy."

The number of hospital beds has fallen faster in London than elsewhere over the past decade but the number of patients treated from outside the capital has increased, counter to expectations when the NHS internal market was introduced in 1992, studies by the King's Fund, the health policy think tank, say. **Jeremy Laurence**

Heads sent rallying cry

Headteachers in every school in England are today being urged to lay aside scepticism and join the crusade to raise standards in the classroom.

David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, is sending out letters to heads and chairs of governors in both state and independent schools hailing a "new beginning for the education service".

Pledging to set up "new machinery" for consultation to allow schools to make their views heard, he says the Government is interested in "what works" rather than dogma.

Labour is promoting the letter as evidence of its commitment both to listen to the teaching profession and to introduce "glasnost" within government. **Lucy Ward**

Cherie holds court

After the euphoric post-election celebrations and a snappy house move, it was business as usual for Cherie Booth yesterday. Ms Booth QC made the 10-minute trip from Downing Street to the Royal Courts of Justice in order to make her first court appearance since the election.

In Court 72, the £200,000-a-year barrister, who specialises in public and employment law, greeted the packed press bench with good humour. "I'm glad you are all so keen to learn about employment law," she told them. **Clare Garner**

Leading article, page 19

Backbenchers' guide

Help is on hand for the hundreds of new MPs currently wandering the corridors of Westminster in a state of bewilderment. Old hand Paul Flynn's new book, *Commons Knowledge - How to be a Backbencher*, which is published today, is the latest in a line of manuals which profit by challenging the parliamentary culture of unwritten rules.

He advises on topics including "How to be Virtuoso Bore", "How to Doughtnut" and "How to Climb the Greasy Pole". Mr Flynn, Backbencher of the Year in 1996, has a reputation for a no-nonsense approach. His chapter "How to convince Voters that the MP Never Stops Working", advises simply: "Never stop working." **Ben Summers**

Commons Knowledge, ISBN 1-85411-206-6, is published by Seren Books; £6.95.

Sir Ted leads the way

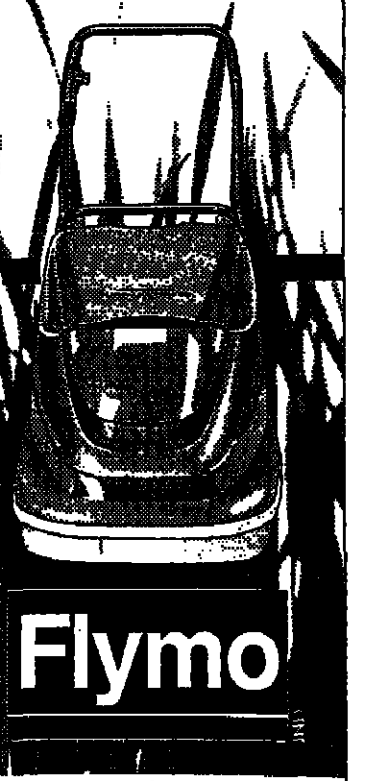
Sir Edward Heath, the former prime minister and the longest-serving MP, took the oath of the Commons for the fourteenth time yesterday. The process continues over the next few days for newer members, all of whom must swear or affirm allegiance to the Queen before they can sit in the House.

The right of the powers involved was once taken for granted, but neither God nor the Queen command the universal respect of the House any longer. Atheist members have had the right to affirm, rather than swear, their allegiance for some years. Many Labour members, and at least one Tory MP, took advantage of this yesterday.

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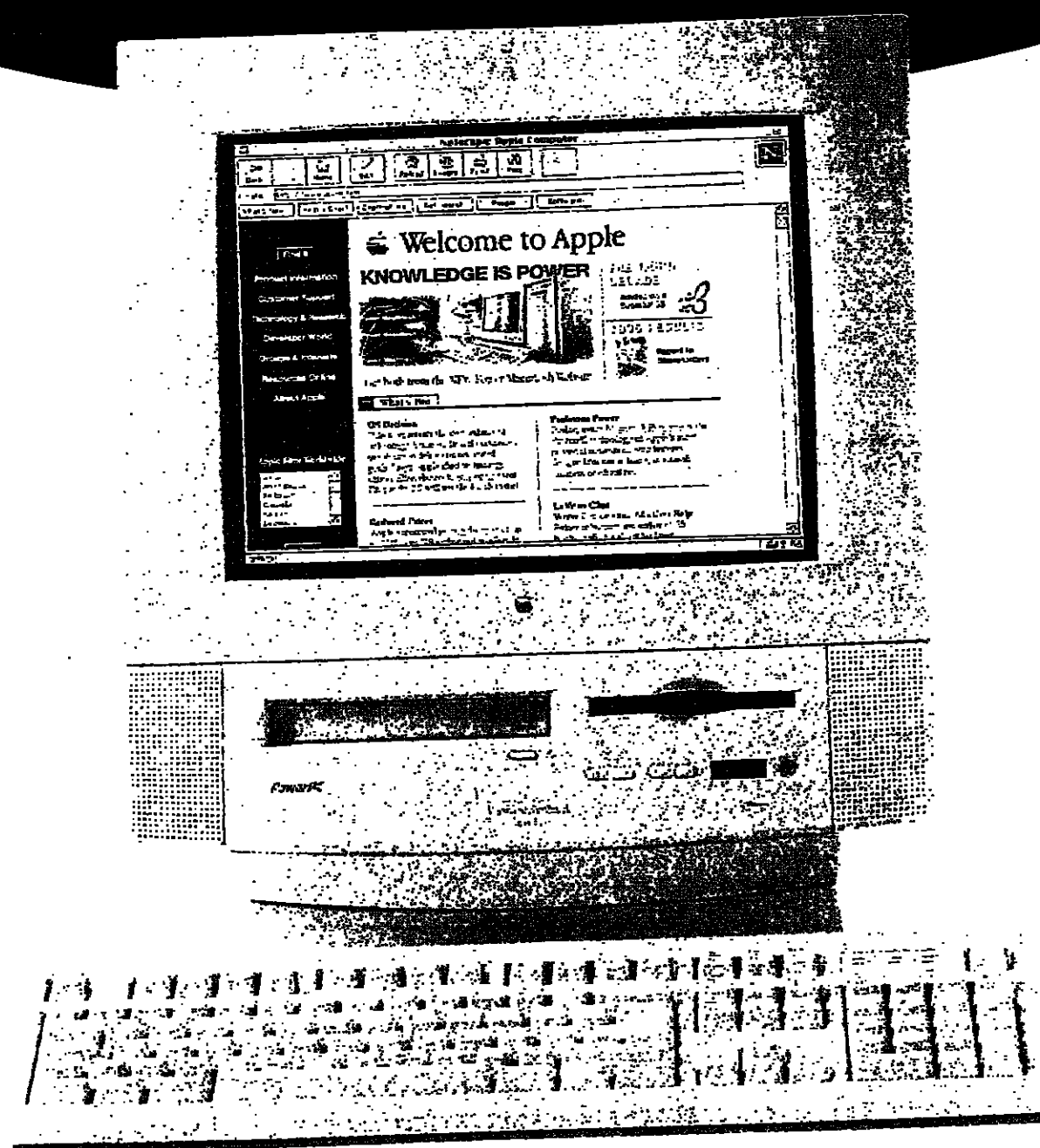
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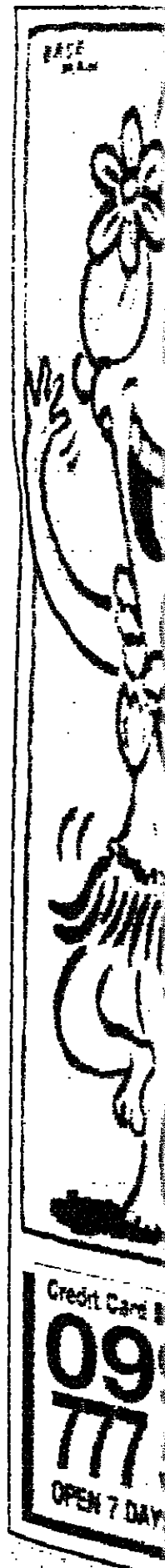


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tory leadership

صوتنا من اليمين

Clarke scents victory over divided right

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

Kenneth Clarke will lead the field in the first ballot for the Tory party leadership, according to his backers and other senior Party sources, who believe he will benefit from a split vote on the Conservative right wing.

William Hague remains the front runner with Michael Howard, the former Home Secretary, and is gathering votes on the centre-right. But a concerted whispering campaign to freeze out John Redwood is being mounted by all the rival camps for the party leadership. One right-wing supporter of Peter Lilley said: "Redwood would be a disaster and split the party."

The bitterness against Mr Redwood, who made himself a Cabinet outcast when he resigned to fight John Major in 1995, will make it difficult for a new leader to bring the Wokingham MP into the shadow Cabinet.

Mr Clarke's campaign will have to overcome a chaotic start, when his advisers were denied access to the Commons because their Treasury passes had been withdrawn. His campaign team had to move into temporary accommodation at the offices of the Tory Reform Group. The former Chancellor's team are counting on Mr Clarke sweeping more than 50 votes in the first round while the right-wing vote splits four ways, between Mr Redwood, Mr Howard, Mr Hague and Mr Lilley.

Mr Clarke's expected lead will put pressure on Stephen Dorrell, the other candidate on the left, to throw his support behind Mr Clarke. "Dorrell has about 10 votes and we can only identify about eight of them," a Clarke supporter said.

The Clarke camp are expecting to gain momentum from the backing of Michael Heseltine in a fortnight, when he is fit again after the heart scare which ruled him out for the leadership. Although he is the one who is most feared by Labour, Mr Clarke still may not gain enough centre-right votes to win.

Mr Dorrell lost ground on the left by appearing to tilt to the Euro-sceptic right. Yesterday he moved again to keep open the option of joining a single currency in the long term. He said Tories should oppose joining the single currency, "unless long-term convergence is a proven and established fact." As that was unlikely, "we should simply make it clear that we are opposed to further consideration of the proposal."

Mr Dorrell also staked his campaign on the revival of Tory support in Scotland and Wales with a visit to Scottish Conservatives. He said in a speech to foreign journalists in London: "We have to show how our values and objectives are relevant to individual voters. We have to convince them the Conservative Party has listened to what it was told on the doorstep."

The Lilley camp began their campaign privately expecting not to win. But the backing of Gillian Shephard as a running mate and the support by Portillo fans who have been deprived of their candidate has given Mr Lilley's campaign more momentum. "He may not win, but it will secure his position as Shadow Chancellor," a supporter said.

THE MEN WHO WOULD BE KING

MICHAEL HOWARD

Former Home Secretary, 55, right-wing loyalist under Major but campaigned inside Cabinet to rule out a single currency.
Campaign theme: I can beat Blair.
Campaign issues: opposes single currency and devolution; need to revive party in Scotland and Wales.
Campaign style: shifty - tried to stitch up Hague. Backers: Sir Michael Spicer (campaign manager), Francis Maude, David Maclean.
Odds: could pip Hague.

KENNETH CLARKE

Man on the Left, 56, former Chancellor.
Campaign theme: Steady Ken.
Campaign issues: his own handling of the economy; pro-European; a big hitter who could hurt Blair.
Style: Hush Puppies and cigars.
Backers: John Gummer, likely to include Michael Heseltine.
Odds: Should win first round but Euro-sceptic right might stop him.

STEPHEN DORRELL

Former Health Secretary, 45.
Campaign issues: anti-European currency, the Union.
Campaign style: cold fish, ex-colleagues say, but warming up. Lost support on Left for appearing to trim to Euro-sceptics. Presentational skills would make him a powerful ally for Ken Clarke, who wants his votes.
Backers: David Faber, ex-PPS, Peter Luff, Simon Burns, Graham Mather MEP and Tim Rycroft (his PR man).
Odds: best chance, to back Ken Clarke.

PETER LILLEY

The former Social Security Secretary, 53, launched campaign with a weekend newspaper article.
Campaign theme: I'm really Michael Portillo.
Style: Spitting image had him in a Hitler Youth outfit, but he's nice, really.
Campaign theme: against single currency's cautious reform of the welfare state.
Backers: Gillian Shephard (running mate) and David Willetts ex-chairman of Tory research department.
Odds: will fall in the second round.

WILLIAM HAGUE

Former Welsh Secretary, 36, a centre-right moderate.
Campaign theme: A Fresh Start.
Campaign issues: anti-single currency, need to bring more young people into the party.
Style: balding, fresh-faced youth.
Backers: Alan Duncan (his PR man), Jonathan Sayeed, James Arbuthnot (campaign manager), Julie Kirkbride.
Odds: Could come through the middle to win.

JOHN REDWOOD

Ex-Welsh Secretary and head of Thatcher's policy unit, 45, ultra-brainy right-winger with a populist touch who challenged Major's leadership in 1995.
Campaign issues: opponent of single currency; seeks to restore Tory appeal on "one nation" issues.
Campaign theme: I'm not a Vulcan.
Campaign style: wants to put "fun" back into Conservative politics.
Odds: may have to sue for a job with the winner.



Photographs: Nicola Kurtz, Tom Pileston, John Voos and Andrew Burman



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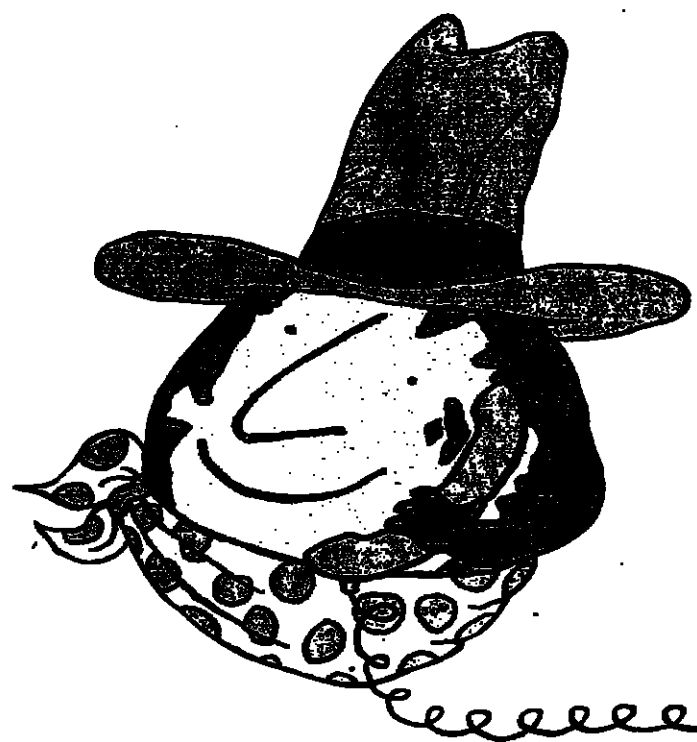
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news

Britain's Cannes virgins bluff their way into the big time

David Lister
Arts News Editor

"It's the five o'clock scramble," explained Harriet Bass, chief executive of the New Producers' Alliance, which has 300 members in Cannes, many of them film makers selling their movies there for the first time.

Ms Bass and her staff are briefing the Brits on how to beat the system at the festival, and get themselves and their product noticed. First though they have to get fed and watered, hence the five o'clock scramble.

"I'm advising the Brits on here how to blag their way into the nightly parties," said Ms Bass. "It's the only way for many of them to eat and drink when you remember a gin and tonic here can cost £8."

"They have to get those precious party tickets. The nightly screenings are always followed by a party, and it means running up and down the Croisette at 5pm and badgering the PR offices for tickets."

"And if you can't get tickets you have to blag your way in. It's easy if you're a girl because you

flirt with the doorman. If you can't do that then always have the name of someone high up on a particular film and say you are related to them. But make sure that their spouse or partner is not standing directly behind you."

More than 100 Cannes virgins went to a private Cannes Survival teach-in in London for a guide to serious networking "take an index box as well as normal business cards". They were particularly instructed to rehearse their pitch nightly in their hotel rooms "over and over again", and (in a style reminiscent of the Hollywood satirical film *The Player*) to be able to deliver it in three sentences.

"The whole of the world's film industry is squeezed into one street for 10 days," Harriet Bass told the nervous Cannes virgins. "You will be subjected to glamour and seediness."

The seediness, she said in Cannes yesterday, was the huge number of liggers and "triers on" desperate to be noticed. You see people come down full of hope and optimism and end up drunk in back street bars, after finding that no one

wanted to buy or see their movies."

Enjoying much greater success but rapidly running short of money is Tom Waller, 22, one of the youngest film makers in Cannes.

He has produced and directed *Monk Dawson*, a film about a Catholic priest's affair with a parishioner, which stars

a model-turned-actress, Paula Hamilton.

Yesterday Waller was on the Croisette, the Cannes sea front, giving postcards advertising his film's screenings to likely buyers, reviewers, movers and shakers.

He was also juggling his finances so that he could escort Miss Hamilton in the style to

which she is accustomed, when she arrives for the round of interviews he has fixed up for her.

"I'm really here on a wing and a prayer," he said. "But I'm fixing things up so that when Paula does arrive she will at least feel like she's a minor celebrity."

"The problem is the expense. I'm going to have to end up paying for every coffee and every

drink she wants to buy. And buying a drink here is extortionate. I'm sure they've put prices up because it's the 50th festival. I'll be drinking coke and I've just remembered Paula's off spirits, so that will help. But I've had to borrow money off my room mate, and credit cards are proving vital."

Andrew Curtis, an enter-

tainment lawyer and a co chairman of the New Producers' Alliance, says it is not just film makers selling their wares in Cannes.

"Lawyers, particularly from the big London firms, go down and are very aggressive, approaching stars and trying to get new clients."

Cannes is a market where

producers, lawyers and corporate executives buy, sell, network and wheeler-deal round the clock, with mealtime providing no respite.

Indeed, a few years back, two lines scribbled on the back of a restaurant napkin between a lawyer and his business client became the contract for *Nightmare on Elm Street*.



Players: Harriet Bass, left, and Victoria Lorkin, who are helping British film-makers work the Cannes publicity machine

Photograph: Brian Harris

School reviews security after gang rape claims

Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

A security review has been set up at a primary school where a nine-year-old girl was allegedly gang raped by five boys aged nine and 10.

The attack is believed to have taken place in toilets at the school in Shepherd's Bush, west London, on Tuesday afternoon.

Four 10-year-old boys and one aged nine were arrested and questioned about what happened, and were released on bail to return next month while detectives make more inquiries.

The girl is being given counselling while the other 176 pupils at the school are also being offered help.

The five boys, all pupils at the school where the alleged attack took place, have been suspended. Social services are also providing counselling for the boys and their parents.

A spokeswoman for the local education authority, Hammersmith & Fulham, said security at the building was being reviewed. She added: "It is perhaps more an issue of supervision as the alleged incident involved pupils from the school rather than outsiders."

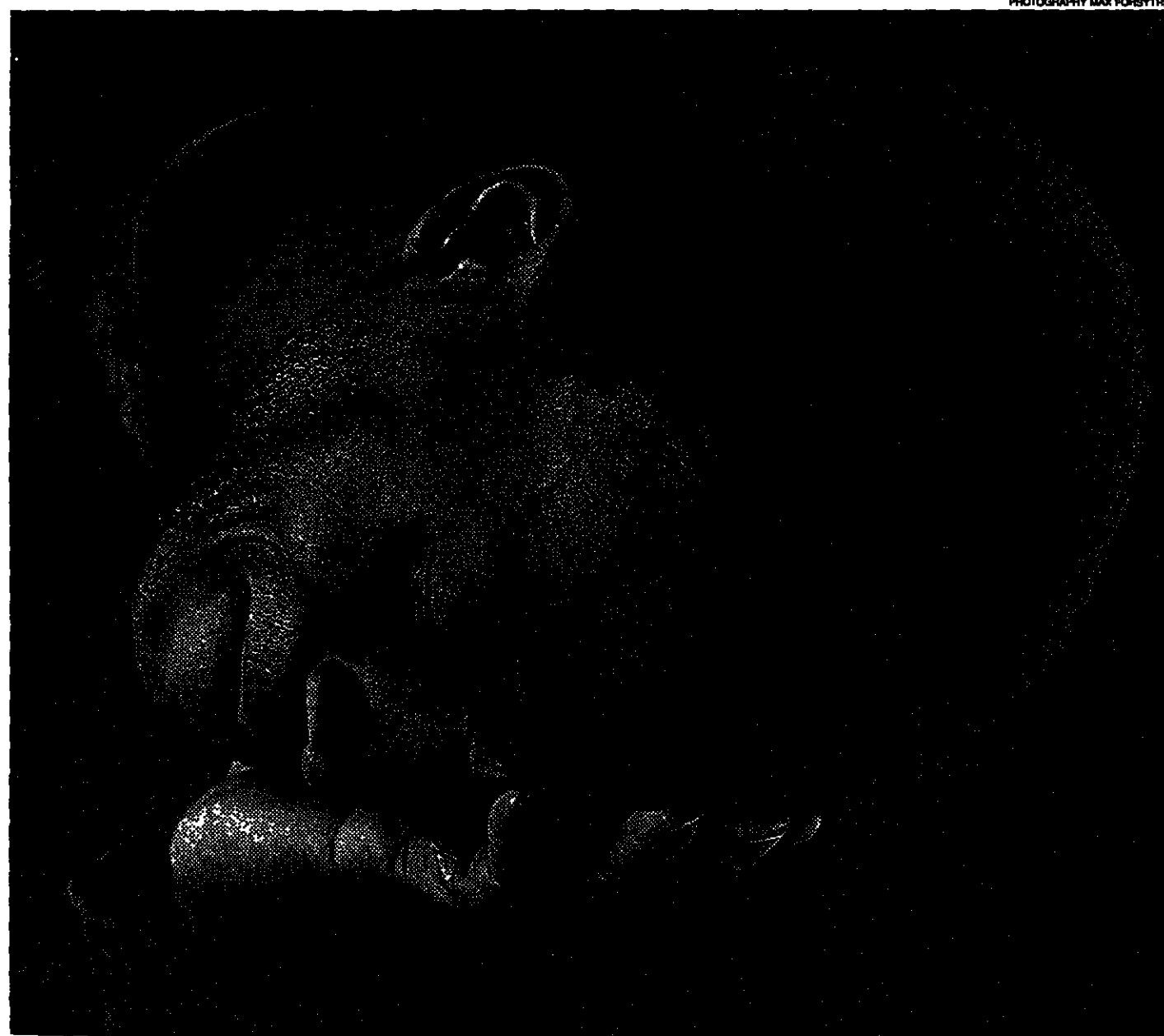
The law has recently been changed to allow 10-year-olds to face charges of rape. Nine-year-olds and younger cannot be held criminally responsible.

The allegation follows a series of violent incidents at

schools - most notably at Dunblane - which have prompted new measures to make playgrounds safer. However most of the changes have been to prevent intruders entering schools.

The current debate about school violence was sparked by the murder of the headmaster Philip Lawrence, outside his school in Maida Vale, north-west London, in 1995.

However it was not until Thomas Hamilton's massacre of 16 children and a teacher at Dunblane last March that the Cullen inquiry was convened. It recommended that every school should have CCTV, panic buttons and personal alarms for teachers, but warned about turning schools into fortresses.



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Rail firm escapes £1m fine for delays

The rail company South West Trains has avoided a £1m fine after improving services last month, it was announced yesterday.

Run by the bus company Stagecoach, SWT attracted criticism for cancelling up to 39 trains a day in February and March after making 70 drivers redundant.

The rail franchising director John O'Brien said yesterday he would not be fining the company but warned SWT that it faced "financial penalties and further serious sanctions" if cancellations increased again.

SWT runs services out of London's Waterloo station to suburbs and as far south-west as Weymouth and Exeter.

The company agreed a redundancy package with drivers at the beginning of the year, but then ran into difficulties when other drivers needed to go on route-familiarisation courses.

"Passengers on SWT suffered an unacceptable level of cancellations in February and March and my priority was to see services restored to normal," said Mr O'Brien.

He said he would have imposed the special £1m fine if SWT had run less than 98.5 per cent of its services in April. But the company had run 99.6 per

cent of trains - which Mr O'Brien described as a "significant improvement". But he warned that if cancellations rose again above 1.5 per cent he would threaten penalties.

The £1m fine with which SWT was threatened was above the normal penalties which rail firms face for failing to meet monthly performance targets.

It had already been fined about £1m for its poor record in February and March.

The Transport Minister, Gavin Strang, said yesterday that he had asked for a report on "the shortcomings of the sanctions currently available to the regulators, to assist in our review of the railway".

He added: "The SWT episode supports our belief that the weapons available to the regulators are inadequate."

"Train operators across the country are on warning: this government will not tolerate inadequate performance."

The Save Our Railways group said it was disappointed at Mr O'Brien's decision. Its co-ordinator, Jonathan Bray, said:

"The £1m fine always was a gimmick. For a while the franchise director posed as a tough regulator - now he's reverted back to being weak and ineffectual."



Given the bird: Peter Nicholas holds one of the aluminium gulls that was junked without his knowing at Cardiff airport. Photograph: Rob Stratton

Sculpted seagulls sent back to skip

Clare Garner

The seagulls in Peter Nicholas's sculpture wound up where they started: in a skip.

The famous sculpture of 42 seagulls, which has hung in the entrance to Cardiff Airport since 1970, began life as a sketch of seagulls circling a rubbish heap.

But a recent refurbishment of the airport resulted in the aluminium birds being thrown into a rubbish skip.

Mr Nicholas, 62, is asking anyone who laid their hands on a bird to bring it back to him so he can reassemble his sculpture.

The £4,000 commission for the sculpture in 1970 was the turning point in Mr Nicholas's career. "An international airport was a prize reference in a cv that was growing. I can no longer refer to it on my cv, except in a negative way," he said.

Mr Nicholas, a fellow of the Royal Society of British Sculptors, is pressing for a charter of artists' rights: "It shouldn't happen to anyone else." He is also demanding a full explanation from the airport authorities.

DAILY POEM

Calais

By Glyn Maxwell

*They tin-opened his head.
Apparently it said
CALAIS across his brain
in red. Which should explain
the puzzlement and pain
and focus that he felt,
that afternoon he smelt
his fuel-and-fishy air,
then mull'd it over in a square*

*like one who little girls
untasselling their hair
in French and combing it to curls
adore when he's thirteen.*

*who wonders what on earth they mean
and guesses and is wrong,
goes pink and carries on,
finds the ferry gone.*

On Monday, the Concordia ensemble will premiere Cry, which combines a specially commissioned sequence of poems by Glyn Maxwell with Elizabethan and Jacobean viol music. Cry will be performed at the Purcell Room, South Bank, London SE1 on 12 May at 7.30 pm, then at the Hay-on-Wye and Dartington literary festivals, on 26 May and 19 July respectively. It will also be available as a CD (Metronome Met CD 1020).

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Pasqua's eloquent gestures say it all for Balladur

John Lichfield in Paris on the rehabilitation of top Gaullists called in to rescue the election campaign

Charles Pasqua, the 70-year-old bull elephant of the Gaullist RPR, is answering a mischievous question pitched to him by a German journalist. The answer lasts a minute or so; it does not contain a single word. Instead, Mr Pasqua's famously crumpled face goes through a gymnastic display of expressions - astonishment, puzzlement, uncertainty, anger, amusement - of which Marcel Marceau would have been proud. Mr Pasqua is one of the toughest politicians in France; and also one of the funniest.

"My mime is my answer," he says at last.

The question was this: would the vicious family quarrel within the Gaullist party be healed, as rumoured, by the startling come-back of Edouard Balladur as prime minister after the French parliamentary election? If I interpreted Mr Pasqua's facial grammar correctly, it would be unwise to bet too many euros on this prospect.

And yet Mr Balladur, a convinced pro-European, and Mr Pasqua, a leading "Euro-sceptic", have both made remarkable recoveries since the French election was called two weeks ago.

In 1995, Mr Balladur ran against his party boss, Jacques Chirac, in the presidential election. He lost. Mr Pasqua, a long-term confidant and supporter of Chirac, chose to support Mr Balladur when he was riding

high in the polls. Afterwards, both were cast into outer political darkness by President Chirac.

And yet both are now much in demand to defend the government from which they were excluded. In Mr Pasqua's case, he is being besieged by requests from RPR candidates to come and waken up a campaign which is in danger of dozing off. Is this not odd? Mr Pasqua is a cuttingly effective politician. But he is often most effective when criticising the policies and record of President Chirac and his Prime Minister, Alain Juppé.

On this occasion, he was talking over breakfast to a small group of foreign journalists. Despite a narrowing of the polls, and signs of alarm in the government camp, he said the centre-right parties would be safely returned to power in the two-round election on 25 May and 1 June. "The Socialists are

not credible. They say they can, all at the same time, cut working hours, increase the standard of living, and reduce unemployment. When the French hear that, they burst out laughing. They are not stupid."

On the stump, Mr Pasqua lashes the Socialists in precisely this way. Push him even a little, however, and he gives his own colourful analysis of the condition of France, and the mood of the French. It amounts to a demolition of the record, and the programme, of the government he nominally supports.

On the European single currency, Mr Pasqua is by far the most eloquent Euro-sceptic of the French centre-right (he is far more right than centre). "The treaty of Maastricht was an historic error," he says. "Any attempt to accelerate towards [European] federalism is condemned to defeat... the single currency was not economically motivated, but politically motivated... It of-

fers no particular economic advantage to France." Unless Emu includes the southern EU countries, and Britain, it will be meaningless, even dangerous.

But aren't his arguments much closer to those of the Socialists (newly-converted Emu-sceptics) than to Mr Chirac and Mr Juppé, who have gambled everything on the coming of the euro?

"I don't give a stuff what the Socialists think. I never think the same as them. Maybe, sometimes, they think the same as me."

Asked to summarise the problems facing France, Mr Pasqua says: "France is a capitalist country, without capitalists." By this he means that there are too few people willing to take risks in France. The government system, and the banking system, are stacked against enterprise and risk-taking.

Mr Pasqua argues that the Juppé government's state-shrinking reforms have got off

on the wrong track, largely because of the demands of Maastricht. It was quite right to reduce the government deficit and debt. But over a longer period, the priority should have been to reduce taxes, and especially the crippling social charges on industry. Instead, the obsession with the Maastricht deficit-cutting timetable led the Juppé government to increase social charges on business.

So this was a historic and stupid mistake, which helped to keep unemployment high? Mr Pasqua goes into his Marcel Marceau routine again.

Mr Juppé remains one of the most detested prime ministers in the history of French opinion polling. He is running a singularly limp campaign. Might Mr Chirac be tempted to dump him if the polls turn worse? Mr Chirac and Mr Balladur had breakfast together on the day we had breakfast with Mr Pasqua. The polls say the French people would like to see the return of Mr Balladur.

But we know - or we think we know - Mr Pasqua's answer to that question.



Mime master: RPR candidates are appealing to Charles Pasqua, the party's bull elephant, to wake up the campaign. Photograph: Gamma/Frank Spooner

THE World of Lily Wong by LARRY FEIGN © 1997

WAI! YOU ARE MY GRANDMA! HEH-HEH! I ATE HER. O GASPI! O MOANI! I SHALL CALL THE RENTIER, WHO WILL SPLIT YOU ASUNDER (Y/NES) AND GET BACK MY DEAR OLD GRAM! YOU WOULDN'T, IF YOU KNEW HOW MUCH THIS PROPERTY COULD FETCH! "SO RED RIDING HOOD AND THE WOLF BOLLOXERED THE HOUSE, BUILT A 66-STORY OFFICE COMPLEX, LAUNDERED THE MONEY THROUGH A BERMUDA SHELF COMPANY AND LIVED TAX-FREE EVER AFTER ON THE COSTA DEL SOL." LILY! WHO GOT HER THIS BOOK? READ IT AGAIN!

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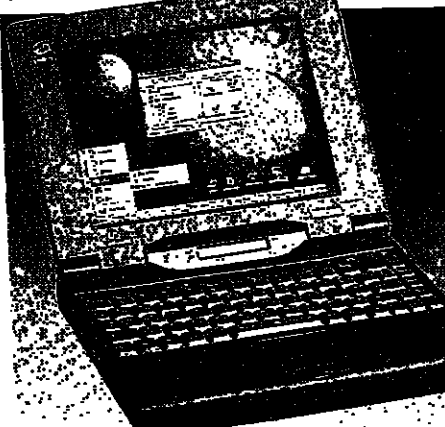
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Quebec plan to break away stuns Canada

For Jean Chrétien, Canada's Liberal Prime Minister, the remarks are a gift from heaven. Speaking to supporters in Quebec City on Wednesday, he said: "We learnt today how the Bloc and their allies tried to fool Quebecers. I deeply believe that Quebecers deserve the truth and the whole truth."



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No one doubts the rebels' pattern is the same. What is uncertain is how tens of thousands of Zairean troops at a dozen camps in and around Kinshasa will react to a rebel attack now there is nowhere left to run.

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Would you buy a lighter from the Great

He may make a good cushion, but **Teresa Poole** in Peking asks whether Mao is politically correct

It is 1997. Hong Kong is being returned to the mainland, and with the world spotlight on the handover, Chinoiserie is in vogue. Western magazines and newspapers feature beautiful Chinese brocade clothes, reproduction Qing dynasty furniture, and Chinese art and ceramics. And in those stylishly designed room sets, it is not unusual to find one familiar face staring out from somewhere on the page. Two decades after his death, Chairman Mao Tse Tung has found a new and surprising role as a design accessory.

In the West, one can buy cushion covers with the Great Helmsman's face, and Mao T-shirts. For those visiting China and looking for something a little more authentic, there are "Little Red Books", Mao propaganda posters, and other Cultural Revolution memorabilia. And for modern-day tacky souvenirs, one cannot beat the

Mao cigarette lighters which play the tune "The East is Red", Mao room thermometers, Mao plates and cups, and for one's desk, a Mao penholder, and so on.

In Peking's "antique" markets, Western tourists eagerly haggle over such trinkets. The same people would not, of course, for one moment ever consider buying a Stalin cigarette lighter, or a Hitler room thermometer. But in the pantheon of world tyrants whose policies resulted in the deaths of millions, Mao memorabilia manages still to be considered chic, or at least amusing.

Someone eating a sandwich off a Mao plate will probably not dwell on the 30 million Chinese who died in the famine caused by Mao's insane Great Leap Forward in the late Fifties. Arranging one's collection of Mao cushions, it is best to forget that when Mao launched the Cul-



Heads up: Wang Arting, a Mao collector in Chengdu, has assembled a remarkable collection of Mao memorabilia

tural Revolution in 1966, anyone who inadvertently sat on a newspaper with a Mao photograph lurking on an inside page was in danger of being thrashed to within an inch of their lives

by the Red Guards as a punishment for such disrespect. One might imagine that the present-day Chinese propaganda machine, which keeps strict control over the repro-

duction of Mao's face and calligraphy within China, would frown on the use of Mao as a design motif in the West. But they have a different viewpoint.

Liu Min, at the Chinese Communist Party's Department for Research on Party Literature, is sanguine. He said: "Mike Tyson tattoos Mao's face on his arm. That expresses his understanding of Mao." "We

wish people outside China can have a wider knowledge of Mao," says Mr Liu. "It is said Tyson regards Mao as a God, he believes Mao can protect him in the ring, he worships Mao. He

understands Mao from his own point of view. Mr Liu does admit, however, with some regret that "the knowledge of Mao by foreigners is probably limited". In the

Yeltsin tries doublethink on Nato

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

President Boris Yeltsin is exhibiting apparent symptoms of political schizophrenia. Yesterday he said a treaty on Nato-Russian relations was "98 per cent ready", and that he might join Moscow talks in person next week to hammer out the last two per cent. Then, almost simultaneously, he said that the plans for Nato's expansion are the most serious dispute between Russia and the US since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

The first comment was, admittedly, aimed at foreign reporters, the second at Russians on Russian television. But the apparently contradictory remarks may indicate a well-trying and traditional strategy - splitting the US from its European Nato allies. The US, represented by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, has been adamant there should be no conditions on Nato's enlargement to embrace new members - probably Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. The US insists Nato must refuse to pledge that there will be no nuclear weapons or foreign troops in new members' territories - even though it has no such plans. The Europeans are more inclined to compromise, understanding Russian concerns.

"Since the Cuban crisis there hasn't been such a sharp issue in relations between Russia and the US, which concern Russia's interests to the degree that everyone should think about it, including Americans and Europeans," Mr Yeltsin said. "It's essential that we take part in all Nato decision-making". That is unacceptable to the US, who insist that although Russia will be able to observe Nato business, it must not have a veto.

Mr Yeltsin's remarks fol-

lowed two days of discussions between Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov and Nato Secretary-General Javier Solana. Mr Yeltsin said he wanted them to sort out their remaining differences at their next meeting in Moscow on 13 May so as to make it possible to sign the Nato-Russia "Charter" before the summit in Madrid on 8-9 July, at which the invitations to new members are to be issued, possibly as early as 27 May.

Mr Yeltsin was laying a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier on the 52nd anniversary of the Allied Victory in Europe. "The main thing now is to ensure Russia's part in Nato decision-making processes," he said. "We also want them not to move their forces into the new territories, including nuclear weapons."

Leading Nato countries, including the US, insist that such a pledge would give the new members a second-class status in Nato. But Nato no longer relies on short-range nuclear weapons, and has no plans or need to station foreign forces on new members' territory. All Nato membership will mean is a few liaison officers at new members' headquarters - and the Russians are likely to have liaison officers there as well.

The Russian view has been coloured by its experience of the now defunct Warsaw Pact, where the Soviet Union dominated the military structure of other member states, and had large Soviet contingents, including short- and medium-range nuclear weapons stationed on their territory. Nato, an Alliance of sovereign states, operated and operates quite differently.

As yet, no one has devised a formula which closes the gap between the Russian and the Nato positions.

Abuse claims heap pressure on Banana

Harare, Zimbabwe (AP) — Students, football players and soldiers have told police of sexual harassment by a 61-year-old man, already under investigation for alleged homosexual rape, a newspaper reported yesterday.

The independent business weekly *The Financial Gazette* said dozens of male complainants reported to a panel of police investigators, who declared eight new cases of harassment by Banana were believed genuine so far. The newspaper quoted an unidentified senior police official as saying allegations of Banana's predatory homosexuality "continue to pour in".

Officials at police headquarters did not return reporters' calls yesterday. Banana, 61, a Methodist theologian, academic and diplomat, is under police investigation for the alleged rape of a police aide when he was the nation's third president after independence in 1980.

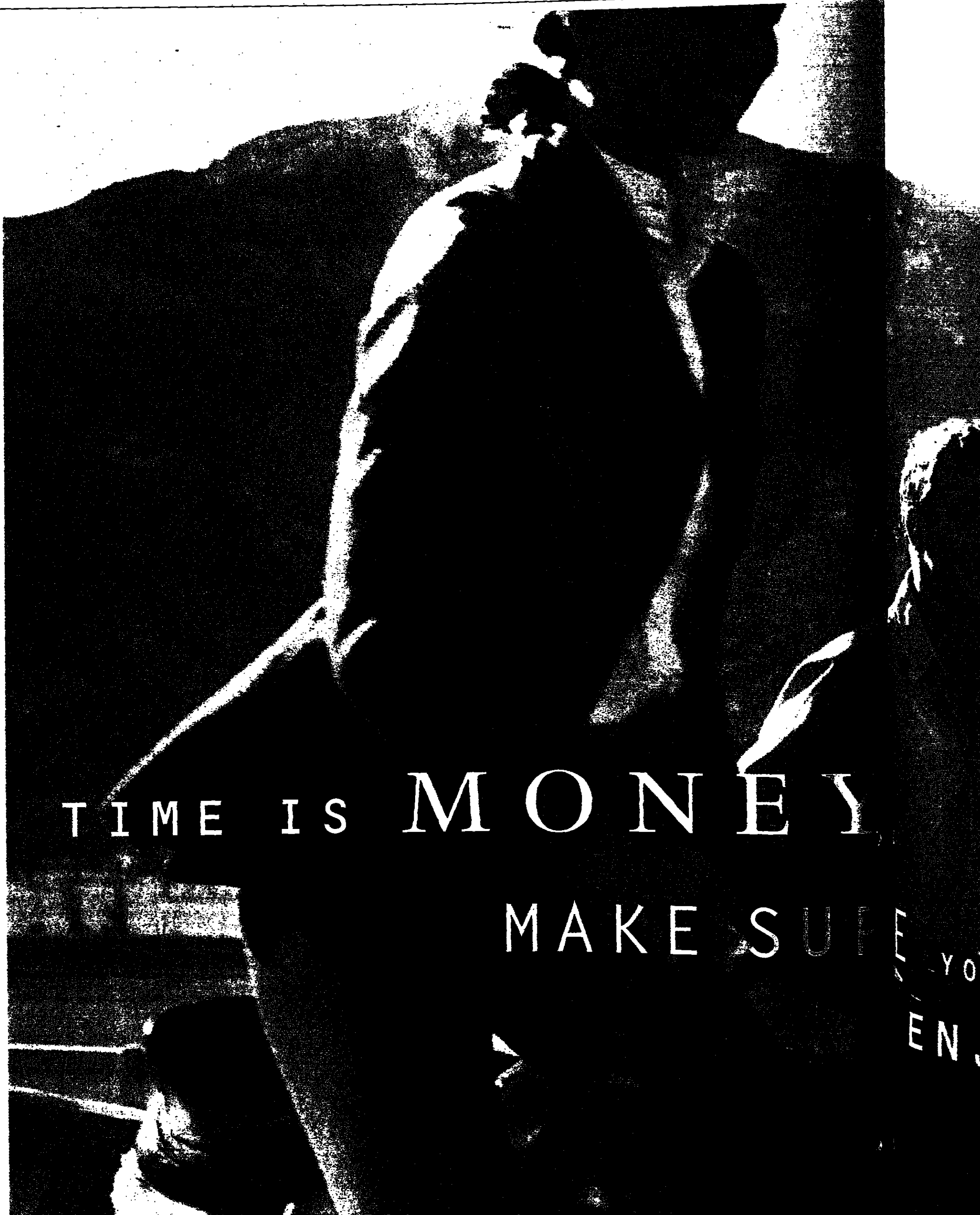
Police Inspector Jetha Dube, 36, was jailed for 10 years in

February for fatally shooting a colleague who taunted him about a three-year homosexual relationship he said was forced on him by Banana.

The High Court in Harare accepted evidence that Dube was sexually harassed by Banana. Homosexuality is illegal in Zimbabwe. Police said they would bring criminal charges against Banana if investigators gathered enough evidence.

Dube's lawyers have filed a civil suit against Banana seeking 1.3 million Zimbabwe dollars (£70,000) in damages for stress-related illness caused by homosexual harassment. Banana is a professor of theology at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare.

Police want to interview university authorities who allegedly ignored complaints from male students, the *Financial Gazette* reports. It said football players from Banana's now-disbanded State House Tornadoes team had come forward with testimony that was being scrutinised.



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Helmsman?

Hong Qiao market, in central Peking, most Westerners buying Mao memorabilia do so because it seems quaint or simply rather ridiculous.

A reproduction Mao snuff bottle can be put to various uses, a reproduction figurine of a revolutionary peasant looks good on the mantelpiece, and a giant Cultural Revolution cloth hanging portrait of the Great Helmsman makes a very unusual bedspread.

The question of the death toll of Mao's rule does not seem to arise. Few tourists have studied post-1949 Chinese history, and China itself still officially reveres Mao, so the issue of possible bad taste is easily sidestepped.

Those who are steeped in Chinese contemporary history are fully aware of what they are buying. Professor David Shambaugh, a Sinologist at George Washington University, admits to a collection of "more than 300" Mao pieces including badges, statues, posters, copies of the Little Red Book in several languages, and a Mao clock.

"It is indeed ironic when

vestiges of totalitarian tyrants, after their demise, assume collector's value and status as memorabilia," he said. "Such is the case with kitsch from the Mao era, and particularly the late Chairman's brainchild of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution - a mass movement that set back China's economy and society incalculably, and cost the lives and careers of hundreds of thousands of Chinese."

Peking's Chinese traders find it all rather improbable. Duan Xinhua, who at 42 years old is part of the generation whose education was wiped out by the Cultural Revolution, is selling off her own family's huge supply of Little Red Books in her Hong Qiao store. She also has a collection of Mao busts, in sizes to suit anyone's needs. "In fact, we don't know what the foreigners are thinking about when they buy these things," she said.

At his stall, Chen Guowei is offering a Cultural Revolution cloth portrait of Mao, made by the Hangzhou "The East is Red" Silk Factory. Does this

amount to mercenary disrespect for the Chairman? "Only people who really like these will buy them. Even the government produces watches with Mao's face. That does not mean we do not respect him. That just shows we really respect him," he said.

For an unwitting foreign tourist, none of this comes cheap. Ms Duan wanted to sell me a 1977 five-volume set of Mao's extended Little Red Book. When published they would have set one back 3.9 yuan (30p); her rather optimistic opening offer to me was 500 yuan (£38).

Tao Zhongyong was one of millions of young Chinese "sent down to the countryside" during the Cultural Revolution, and did not manage to return to Peking for 20 years. Last year he put me off the whole Cultural Revolution shopping experience. "Chinese people still feel very deeply about that period. And they feel uncomfortable to know that foreigners, as spectators, like the art and artefacts of the Cultural Revolution. Everybody should know that it was a tragedy," he said.



Coining it: Market stalls like this one in Peking sell coins, lighters and cushions to the tourists

Photograph: Reynard Nicolas/Gaïma

'Megan's law' murder puts public on trial

Mary Dejevsky
Washington

An emotionally charged murder case that went to trial this week in Trenton, New Jersey, has commanded American national attention over and above that accorded even to a particularly poignant child murder. It had made history - and law - well before the trial opened, and what is at stake is not just the life of the alleged killer, but the fate of a highly popular, but increasingly controversial, piece of legislation.

The defendant is Jesse Timmendquas, 36, who is additionally charged with kidnapping and sexual assault. The seven-year old victim is known across the US only as "Megan", and the law that her killing inspired requires courts to inform local people when a convicted sex offender is released or paroled into their community.

On 29 July 1994, Megan Kanka is said to have knocked on the front door of Timmendquas, a recently-arrived neighbour, and asked to see the puppy he had just acquired. He invited her in. In the words of the prosecution lawyer, "Unsuspecting, trusting, seven-year old Megan walked into the defendant's house ... She would never walk out."

Her mother said that at first she had been unconcerned about her daughter's disappearance because "this is such a nice neighbourhood". But her illusions had been shattered when police showed her pieces of her daughter's clothing that had been found in the dustbin of the house opposite - where Timmendquas lived.

He is said to have led police to a nearby park where they found Megan's body. Several statements and a signed confession eventually followed. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

The subsequent revelation that Timmendquas already had two convictions for sex offences provoked fury in the quiet suburban district of Hamilton Township, and Megan's mother led a campaign to require the authorities to notify neighbours when a convicted sex offender moves in. The campaign developed into a national crusade, and 41 states followed New Jersey's lead in passing "Megan's laws".

The exact provisions of the laws vary, but they all permit - or require - neighbours to be told when anyone who has a conviction for a sex offence settles nearby. They augment a requirement for sex offenders in all states to be registered with the police.

This week's trial has revived all the passion and outrage that was unleashed by Megan's murder. But there is also a sense in which it has come only just in time for the law's supporters. In eight states, including New Jersey, the "Megan's laws" are currently on hold: they are on the statute book but not being enforced because legal challenges are pending. Released sex offenders must register with the police, but there is no obligation to make their place of residence public.

The legal challenges reflect

the gathering strength of a reverse campaign that was launched when the sweeping effects of the new law started to become apparent. Those joining the backlash included not only civil liberties activists and people concerned with privacy, but also some of the very state legislators who had helped pass the original "Megan's laws".

They say they underestimated the strength of popular anger and revulsion where sex offenders are concerned. They had not expected, they said, that requiring released sex offenders to register their addresses and supplying the information to neighbours would mean - with rare exceptions - that the individual concerned would become an outcast, unable to settle anywhere for long, unable to start a new life even though he had served his sentence.

Some say the legislators' miscalculation only illustrated how far officialdom was out of touch with popular opinion. One well-documented case is that of a former offender who settled in Orange County, California. Neighbours were alerted to his presence by police leaflets giving his picture and warning: "a serious sex offender has been released into the community". People were advised to protect

Those joining the backlash included some of the legislators who had helped to pass the laws

themselves and their children. Not only did they do that, but also they photocopied the leaflets, posted them on lamp-posts, and organised protests.

The former offender was hounded from his first new neighbourhood by public demonstrations, placards and graffiti. He received death threats and lost his job. He found a new flat, but the manager terminated his lease when his identity was reported.

In one district of Georgia, names were publicised in public libraries - and then broadcast on local radio. New Mexico is proposing to post the names and social security numbers of offenders on the Internet.

Some of those now trying to change the law argue that sex offenders will simply choose to flout the law on registration if they are made outcasts. Others say that more general warnings could be issued in the neighbourhood, without pictures or addresses. Some of the "Megan's laws" anyway require notification only in the case of "high-risk" offenders.

In time, the rights of children to protection and the constitutional rights of individuals to privacy are likely to be weighed against each other in court. Until then, the balance will remain uncertain, but the odds that Jesse Timmendquas will ever benefit from a revised law look slim.



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A schematic diagram of a single neuron. The cell body (soma) is on the left, containing a nucleus. A dendrite extends from the soma to the left, and an axon extends from the soma to the right. The axon is covered by a myelin sheath, represented by a series of rectangular segments. The axon terminates in a terminal button on the right.

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reportage

It's Cook's tour, says Robin

The new Foreign Secretary travelled to Paris and Bonn in unaccustomed style, but he quickly found the right notes to strike with his opposite numbers, writes Donald Macintyre, who accompanied him on his journey

I was Douglas Henderson, the new Minister of State for Europe, who summed it up. As the RAF BAe 146 touched down at Paris's Villacoublay military airport after an in-flight breakfast of bacon, omelette, hot rolls and – of course – Fortnum and Mason marmalade, the one-time engineering apprentice and trade union official from Fife surveyed the scene, starched napkins, silver cutlery and all, and declared: "Well, it beats flying Britannia to Tenerife."

You still feel that Henderson – a smart man who, in the 72 hours since he was appointed to join his boss Robin Cook at the Foreign Office on Sunday, has learnt more about the EU than most of us learn in a lifetime – thinks he will suddenly wake up and find it's all a dream. He knows this is a serious job – coveted before the election by Peter Mandelson, no less. But now, standing in the sumptuous tapestried solemnity of the Quai D'Orsay (at the steps of which the French lay on not just a red carpet, but a 14-strong sabre-brandishing guard of honour, splendid in gold braid and kepis, formed by the elite Garde Republicaine), he just can't stop himself breaking out in a grin or a wink.

It's partly, of course, that the trappings of power pass so swiftly and conspicuously from vanquished to victors in the British system. It's not just the hushed, respectful tones of the RAF personnel who carry the bags at Northolt, or the blue, armoured embassy Rolls Royce in which the new Foreign Secretary sweeps through Bonn (Henderson having to make do with a mere Jaguar) or the company of

some of the keenest brains in Whitehall, like Paul Lever, the FCO's deputy secretary for Europe, and Jeremy Greenstock, the political director. It's also that everyone wants to hear what you say and know what you think.

Nigel Scheinwald, the Foreign Office's head of news, strains to hear what Cook is saying to a handful of journalists above the roar of the 146's jet engines: after all, this will be the New Line, distributed to dozens of news-hungry British embassies, to the world's press, to foreign governments. After less than a week the Line is still emerging. That's the peculiar thrill of a new government. Every remark the Secretary of State makes, every nuance, almost every raised eyebrow, helps the eager officials first to grasp what the Line will be, and then, with clinical efficiency, to ensure that it prevails. They are too professional to say so, but it's a Line they actually want to hear. Being nice to foreigners from time to time makes quite a change.

And this was very much – as the Foreign Secretary himself could not resist calling it – Cook's tour. Unlike Henderson, Cook has had almost three years to prepare for this moment. (Though even he momentarily forgot how much has changed: during a meeting with Hervé Le Charette, the French Foreign Minister, who chain-smoked his way through a working lunch with his new counterpart, of lobster, lamb, red fruits and ice cream, Cook referred to what "Labour", rather than The Government, would do).

Like Gordon Brown, with his decision on autonomy for the Bank of England, Cook hit the ground running, saying that Britain would sign up to the



Welcome to Kinkel's place: the Foreign Secretary will be looking for Cook's Diner to return the favour

Reuters

Social Chapter at next month's inter-governmental conference in Amsterdam. The move reverberated instantly through Europe. And it set a wholly new tone, first for Cook's trip this week, and second for the talks about the IGC which Tony Blair will have in London today with Wim Kok, the Dutch premier and holder of the EU Presidency.

There was also a modest stroke of good luck: Klaus Kinkel was not back from Egypt until Wednesday afternoon so Cook could go to Paris in the morning – making quite a lot of the fact when he got there that it was the first foreign country he had visited since the election – without offending Kinkel by going to Bonn second.

Just to make sure, when the talks began over asparagus, beef and wine with the German Foreign Minister at the coincidentally named Kinkel-Stuben restaurant, the Foreign Secretary promised to find a Cook's Restaurant for Kinkel to visit in London. This was not, perhaps, the greatest joke in the history of British diplomacy. But it seemed to break the ice. One German official sought out a senior British diplomat to say how impressed he had been not only by Cook's mastery of his brief but by his sense of humour. The talks produced one startling discovery: Kinkel appeared distinctly uncertain about the intricacies of the quota-hopping row over fishing. Was it possible that Tory ministers had not been quite as angry about the issue in private as they were in public? Cook made nothing of this, of course. Instead, in a TV interview he neatly turned the Tories' "puppet Blair" campaign poster

to the advantage of future Anglo-German relations. "It was," he said magisterially, "quite inappropriate to the head of another government."

Another good omen was the extraordinary impact the Labour victory has had on French, and to an extent, German politics. In France there was extensive coverage of last Thursday's election with the newspaper *Libération* carrying 24 pages, edited in London. The event has become an issue in the French elections, with the right claiming that Blair won because he moved

'Every politician in France wants to be Tony Blair'

his party away from the left, and the socialists claiming that it showed that the left can win. "Every politician in France wants to be Tony Blair," a French TV journalist told Cook in Paris. "Everyone wants to be Tony Blair," Cook replied.

Lionel Jospin, the French socialist leader, in his private talks with Cook in cramped offices in the rue de Valenciennes (offices which are more Transport House than Millbank), wanted to know all about New Labour and was gripped by the conquest of the centre ground – though unlike Blair he has the disadvantage of competition from the communists on the left.

For Oskar Lafontaine, chairman of

the German SPD, who greeted Cook with an enormous bear hug, the Blair victory has not been an unmixed blessing. The British party were shown a newspaper headline quoting Gerhard Schröder, Lafontaine's popular, formidable and modernising rival, saying that he was the Tony Blair of the German left. If Cook, as a possible left-wing challenger to Blair after John Smith's death, felt a sneaking twinge of sympathy, he certainly wasn't letting on.

A clear New Labour strategy towards Europe is starting to emerge. Aside from his opposition to the single currency, Cook is a Euro-pragmatist rather than a Euro-sceptic. Any disappointment in Paris and Bonn about Britain's reluctance to join the single currency in the first wave was offset by Cook's clear promise not to obstruct its formation during our Presidency in the first half of 1998. It's true that the increasingly Europhobic tone adopted by both the main parties in the run-up to the election reflected, and perhaps contributed to, a mood of public suspicion about Europe. That mood was fuelled by *The Sun*, Labour's powerful new ally from the nationalist right.

That mood, Cook appears to believe, could change quickly if Britain is seen to secure even quite modest successes in Europe without giving ground on issues like borders or foreign policy. Even *The Sun*, which has had to perform a somersault roughly equivalent to that of the communist *Daily Worker* in the wake of the Nazi-Soviet pact, was curiously muted last Monday about the decision to go ahead and sign the Social Chapter. Is it so unimaginable

that we could see headlines in it like "Blair pulls off deal for Britain"?

Cook's strength is that he has a persuasive story to tell about the forthcoming IGC which belies the Tories' pre-election rhetoric about the sur-renders being prepared by Labour. He was, by all accounts, impressively robust in his talks with Kinkel and Le Charette about Britain's insistence on maintaining border controls, on keeping the EU out of defence, and on the dangers that so-called "flexibility" proposals could lead to an inner cabal, its nucleus formed by the countries which join EMU. On this last – and potentially still one of the most difficult subjects for Amsterdam – Cook was clear: such flexibility shouldn't apply to the main economic areas of the EU or to foreign policy. And it should only apply in areas like immigration and justice if all 15 states agreed and probably more than half – perhaps 10 – agreed to take part. And he argues that Britain is much likelier to get its way on all this if it doesn't make a virtue out of challenging every single other proposal. Cook is careful not to promise a successful outcome: "By not fighting needless battles," he says, "we will be able to focus energies on the battles we must win."

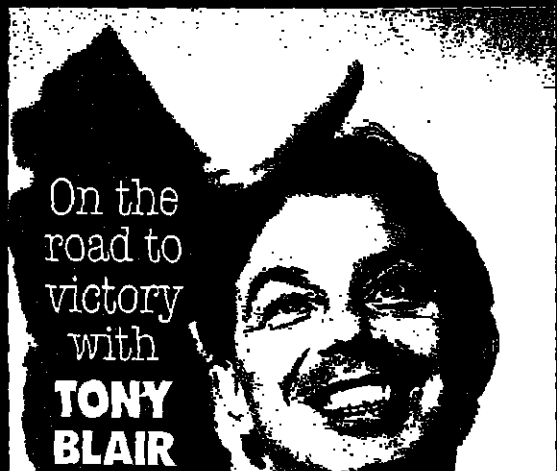
But he is also careful to stress that in several, if not all, of the areas in which Britain is prepared to reach agreement, she has a specific interest in doing so. The Social Chapter is being signed, he says, not to be nice to Europe, but because British workers should have the rights embodied in it. On the European Parliament he even seemed to be baffled why the

Tory sceptics oppose the new powers he and Blair are ready to concede. So far from being an integrationist move, he says, it will help Strasbourg to impose a "democratic check" on the EU's other institutions. It's "totally weird" of the Tories to oppose ending the veto on anti-fraud measures when it simply means that a fraudulent country can avoid penalties. And so on.

It's almost impossible to underestimate the impact of this change in language. Particularly since there are growing signs – evident in Cook's talks with Kinkel this week – that the Germans are now anxious to get through the IGC with the minimum of fuss in order to clear the decks for EMU. To be sure of this change of public mood, the government needs to make headway on lifting the beef ban – which it has always held up as the most catastrophic failure of government policy.

Cook shows every sign of knowing this; but he is guarded. It will, he says, need time. A sure sign of the new alignment is that the Italians have started complaining vociferously to London about all this talk of France, Germany and Britain as the "big three" of Europe. It seems increasingly likely that the public mood could start changing faster than looked possible before the election, as a result of a successful, and relatively non-integrationist, IGC. Britain remains hostile to grand integrationist designs. And so do Cook and Blair. But real leadership in Europe would be a novel and attractive prospect. It could even make some Tories wonder if they have really been fighting the wrong battles.

The Inside Story of Blair's Campaign



VICTORY

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Cheer up, it's National Eternal Verities Day

In this age of change, as we sweep towards the 21st century and a world of Internet and computers, and away from the simple verities of the 20th century like world wars and genocide, I find that many people feel they have nothing safe and sure left to hold on to. Here, for instance, is a letter from a reader which says: "Dear Mr Kington, I can sense that, beneath the trendy flash and modish references of your column, you are as much of an arch-conservative as I am. Could you comfort readers like me by providing us with a list of things that never change and which we can keep in mind, especially those of us who have been recently saddened or sidelined by progress?"

Willingly, Mr Portillo. Here is a short selection of the many things which never change in daily life, and which we can always cling to.

1. Large posters for films which tell you everything you need to know about the people involved ("Music orchestrated by William Frankster from an idea by

Carl J Krieger") but nothing about the film itself except one of those meaningless cliché slogans: "One of them had to die. Each thought it was the other. Both were wrong..."

2. Boxes of safety matches which lie around the house untouched until, when you finally come to use them, you find they are no good, either because somebody has filled them entirely with used matches, or because the striking surface has gone too damp to provide friction, or because the heads of the matches are so old they fall off on contact.

3. Tiny sticky labels on French apples saying "French apple".

4. Birthday cards which specify who they are for, as in "The Best of Birthdays to my dearest Great-Aunt".

5. Large, deep puddles which form in filling stations after five minutes of rain in such a place that you never notice them until you get out of your car and find yourself standing in one of them.

6. Orange, red and blue posters standing on sticks in the middle of fields urging



Miles Kington

you to vote for people called Foster, Chester or Blister in an election which took place months ago.

7. People who automatically pronounce "picturesque" as "picture-skew" even though they long ago gave up expecting people to laugh at it.

8. "You are here" patches on town maps and tube maps, tourist maps and street maps, which are totally worn away and made illegible because many people cannot read public maps without putting their finger on the place marked "You are here" and tracing their route manually.

9. Huge posters which are so obscure that it takes a while to work out what the product being advertised is, and a lot longer to work out the connection.

10. Weather forecasts which are so versatile in their predictions that whatever happens seems to have been covered in the forecast, suggesting perhaps that meteorology and astrology are not so far apart as some of us might think.

11. VCR machines which, when you come to use them for timing a TV recording, are showing nothing but a flickering screen because there has been some recent electrical power cut, which means you now have to set the clock and date again, which means getting out the instructions for the machine, wherever they are...

12. The piece of card you normally put under the shortest leg of your kitchen table and which someone has thrown away because it didn't look as if it were needed.

13. Cellophane skins tightly wrapped round new tapes, cigarette packets, etc.

which look as if they will need a slight tug to remove but which are in fact designed to repel all but the fiercest onslaught with scissors, knife and gun.

14. Serial stories in the press which feature someone called "Little Lucille" or "Young Wesley" in such headlines as "Little Lucille Still in Danger" or "No Sign of Young Wesley" and which mean nothing at all to you if you happen to have missed the first episode.

15. Days which are designated National Days, as in National Smile Day, National Limerick Day or National Correct Signalling Day, though the only sign of this is someone on Radio 4's *Today* programme saying, "Well, today of course is National Smile Day, so cheer up, James," which is the last reference to it you get for the rest of the day.

16. Snooker, the annual world championship of which seems to come round every three months and to last two-and-a-half months.

A much fuller list of slightly irritating things which never change can be found in your daily paper

The well of cynicism runs dry



We had almost forgotten what politics is for ... it is there to change things, says Andrew Marr

Before the election, Tony Blair dismissed talk of a "first hundred days" of frantic activity by which his administration could be judged. Natural caution, no doubt; but the first hundred-plus hours have been extraordinary enough. What- ever disappointments lie ahead, no one can now say that Labour has come into government without the ideas or energy needed for success.

Among the welter of interviews, promises, bills being prepared and appointments announced, there is already a theme emerging. It could be called the politics of executive power. A disciplined centralism not seen in Whitehall outside wartime is briskly unveiled. New Labour MPs, with freshly crumpled Underground maps to hand, are ordered to abstain from strong drink, sexual congress and political talk of all kinds.

The key promises of the manifesto are quickly prioritised. Bills are ordered up with a sense of urgency we haven't seen for years. Knuckle-cracking civil servants, grinning with trepidation, are told what is what; and find their new masters more forceful and confident than they'd expected.

The Governor of the Bank of England is bundled early out of bed and frogmarched by a team of beetle-browed former journalists from the *Financial Times* to be handed Britain's interest rate policy by Gordon Brown. Across the Channel, meanwhile, Robin Cook is kissed, despite his bristles, by numerous smooth Frenchmen and then heartily palpaté by Germans.

Press officers in departments across London are told to clear every announcement with Alastair Campbell. Journalists are warned that the days of basted quails and lemony Sancerre with young ministers are over. A V-form of despatch riders roars down the Mall to inform the Queen that, from now on, permission to leave her private apartments will have to be obtained in writing from the office of Peter Mandelson.

Well, I exaggerate a little. But the self-confidence and purposefulness of the New Labour leadership is remarkable, surprising and admirable.

Of the changed ministerial briefs, most are encouraging. For example, Donald Dewar is the right man to carry forward Scottish devolution and Nick Brown will make a formidable Chief Whip, with just the right mix of geniality and brutality. Though Chris Smith will be disappointed not to be given Health, he is the right man for the Department of National Heritage – which he should quickly rename the Ministry of Culture – and has a very good team there. They can make more of a difference to the country's mood than perhaps they yet realise. Overall, my impression is of a Government which is less doughy and more inter-

esting than we could have hoped for. Things will not carry on as blithely as this. Events and political entropy will take their toll. It may be sensible, but I do not believe the control being attempted by Number 10 will be sustainable. It isn't compatible with Parliamentary politics. Government is too big, and there are too many big egos involved. More important are the big political and even philosophical issues still to be resolved by New Labour. As hard choices are made, the coalition of assent created by Blair in opposition will begin to fracture. It will not be possible to carry through radical pensions reform without extra resources. It will not be possible to make enough of a difference in the Health Service or education without diverting funds or finding new money.

Yet any tax increases in the coming Budget, whether from council tax, VAT, allowances or inheritance tax, will anger parts of the Middle England New Labour has so assiduously wooed. Well, some enemies have to be made. Blair might reflect, perhaps, that he won his landslide more because the Tory voters stayed at home than because of an army of Home Counties converts; and that he will be forgiven some extra taxation – so long as it is not extreme – if he shows a clear sense of direction and political purpose. What is intolerable is squandered taxation.

On the other big choice confronting Labour, whether to be radical/reformist, or conservative/centralist, the early evidence is mixed. There are the already cited centralising tendencies inside Government. If those hardened into an obsessive "control freak" culture, then we could suddenly find Labour renegeing on its commitment to reviving local democracy – or democracy generally. The Government could perfectly well have introduced a Freedom of Information Bill straight away; I will be uneasy until it does.

Against all that we must set the vigour and appetite for reform that is in the Queen's Speech list – including Scottish and Welsh devolution and the planned referendum on London government, as well as the freer financial regime for town halls. On balance I think we should be heartened by the Blairites' early moves on reform. Above all, there is an impatient energy coursing through Westminster that hasn't been there since the heyday of Thatcherism. We had almost forgotten what politics is for – not for internalised party vendettas, or colloquies on the nature of sovereignty, or TV soap opera, or even to provide the raw material for show-off journalism. It is there to change things. And maybe it's lowering my bucket over the past few days, I've discovered that my well of cynicism isn't quite as fetid and bottomless as I'd thought.



Welcome to 'Blair's Babes' but the struggle goes on

Labour has 101 women in Parliament thanks to feminist drive, but what will they do for their worse-off sisters, asks Suzanne Moore

This is an historic occasion indeed! Margaret Beckett has been called a babe. There she is down at the front of that terrific picture of Tony Blair surrounded by all the New Labour women on the steps of Church House. The *Daily Mail* chose to headline this image "Blair's Babes". Matthew Parris commented somewhat archly: "So many purple suits! So much hair-spray!" It all reminded me of that picture of Hugh Hefner surrounded by his Playboy Bunnies, except of course that these women are not bunnies, they are, say it again, MPs.

The sudden visibility of women is so enchanting, one is inclined to forget that only two weeks ago women were virtually invisible in the election campaign. Indeed, now that we are in the mood, we can forgive and forget a lot of things if we really try, just like Tony Blair forgot to tell Harriet Harman that she was in fact ... er, Minister for Women. We can forget that Roy Hattersley called women-only shortlists "a silly idea", that Blair himself described the scheme as "not ideal at all". We can forget the battles that Clare Short had when she was Spokesperson for Women. We can forget the promise of a separate and properly funded Ministry for Women.

Now that new era has begun and New Labour flaunts its femininity, perhaps these things may be eminently forgettable. We just don't need to worry our pretty heads about positive discrimination anymore. Look how much better Labour is than the Tories with their unlucky 13 female MPs. Anyway, affirmative action, that offensive Americanised phrase, snacks

of political correctness, of old-fashioned feminism, of a bygone era of wimmin, of Big Sister watching every move.

It is easy enough to say that things would have got better all by themselves. After all, this is the age of Girl Power, of a culture in which girls are outperforming boys at every level. In some classes and in some situations this is certainly true. The earnings gap between young male and female professionals is closing. Yet at both the top end and bottom end of society, the gender gap is as wide as it ever was. Only 3 per cent of company directors are female, and at the other end of the scale the impoverishment of single parents means thousands of women and children are living in appalling circumstances.

The idea of separate women's issues has become almost meaningless, but if anything is a women's issue, it is the minimum wage that looks like being set at a lower level than has previously been discussed. Had the Minister for Women's job not been tucked on to Harriet Harman's already bulging portfolio, it is possible to imagine that some of Labour Party's commitments to women might be delivered. Of course none of these commitments were in the Labour party pledges, so no actual promises will be broken. None the less, both those within and without the party have expectations about what a Labour government will actually do for us.

Despite the photo-opportunities, less than a quarter of the new

intake are women. So how many of these were propelled into power through the despised all-women shortlists? Less than a third. If we say that perhaps half of these women might have got through anyway, we are talking perhaps about 15 women who benefited from this quota system. Yet what these shortlists did was raise the profile of women in the party, provoking a debate that meant a sluggish and smug institution became more self-aware. Barbara Follett's powerful argument at the time was that without doing anything, nothing would change. As she reminded us, Labour returned the same number of women to Parliament in 1987 as it did in 1945. Blair, in one sense, was right to say that the shortlists were not ideal, but then the alternative was doing nothing and ending up like the Tory Party.

Positive discrimination in favour of women, as we have seen in other countries, often means that its beneficiaries are defensive. It also means a male backlash with men cast as the new victims. Yet it is a means to an end; and at conference last year, Labour backed a motion calling for a target of 50 per cent female MPs in the next 10 years. It was proposed by Clare Short, who described it correctly as the "biggest modernisation of all". Even Tories were forced to comment on the number of bright young women at conference. Boris Johnson registering much Hot Totty on his own personal Totymeter.

And now that the Totty is on display, giggling in the corridors of

power and presumably having to queue to get into the Ladies, they remain an unknown quantity. The expression "transitional women" is being bandied about. It applies to the Harman and the Jowells, the women who were already considered acceptable by the boys.

There is nothing transitional about the new mob of women, their number makes them a solid presence. Some of them even wear normal clothes instead of those peculiar power suits.

What with a handful of openly gay MPs, someone in a wheel-chair, a few more black faces, Parliament is getting nearer to representing a cross-section of the population. Nearer but not near enough.

In the flush of victory it is easy to forget that just as it is easy to overlook the fact that those 101 female MPs were not delivered by Mr Blair's hand alone. They were delivered by a combination of cultural change – the electorate has less of a problem in voting for a woman than ever before – and political activism: a conscious, stubborn and explicitly feminist drive towards

equal representation. The irony, not so gentle, is that at a time when such feminist tactics are referred to as "so Seventies", as completely out of touch and out of date, they have produced such a dramatic change in the House of Commons.

For the Tories this is yet another problem that they must deal with if they want to reconstitute themselves as a serious party. At a grassroots level they need to persuade their female supporters to vote for women instead of more ghastly Tory Boys. For the Conservatives to impose any sort of quota system is almost inconceivable, but without one it is difficult to see how any sort of progress will be made.

However, while New Labour congratulates itself on its landslide and its new feminised culture, it should also remember its irritating little anthem "Things can only better ...". While we are looking forward, glance backward over New Labour's shoulder and you will see the struggle it has been to produce this profound shift in its own culture. Being a politician means never having to say you are sorry and I don't expect Blair to be any different; but he cannot be allowed to take all the credit here. At long last the party has delivered up some women. The question now is this: what can the Government deliver for all women?

What little doctors need to learn

Ten-year-old boys are supposed to be interested in football, computer games and Rollerblading – the joys of youth. Not girls. Not sex. Not rape. So many people will be shocked to hear that four of them (and a nine-year-old) have been bailed after the alleged rape of a nine-year-old girl at a London primary school. The girl was, it is claimed, assaulted in a lavatory at lunchtime.

It is too soon to comment on the particular case. Few facts have been confirmed. All we can be sure of is that this little girl has had a very traumatic experience, from which it will be difficult to recover. But the story does provide an opportunity for some long overdue honesty about what really happens in the playground.

First of all, like it or not, children have a sexual interest in each other very early on. Among five- or six-year-olds, you will hear the comment: "Miss, he's sexing her." It might be that a boy and a girl are just lying in the cosy corner of the classroom having a cuddle, play-acting, but it is the beginnings of interest. At seven, they might have a special friend from whom they steal a kiss. At nine and ten, children have girlfriends and boyfriends and the furtive kissing may be more experimental. For the boys, it is often a case of bravado, of proving themselves to their peers, whereas the girls, who are more mature, may actually have a crush on a boy.

But it isn't all just playing doctors and nurses. Sexual exploration can get rough, even in primary school. After all, about one in four girls are menstruating by



Jack O'Sullivan

Young boys interested in sex need to be taught more than just names for parts of the body

their final year and a small minority of boys will also have entered puberty (the average age is 12, although the poverty of research about boys means we don't really know). A few are taller than some of their teachers, and their voices have dropped. "It is a safe assumption that one or two in a year group will be capable of ejaculation," according to Dr John Coleman of the Trust for the Study of Adolescence.

Primary school teachers will tell you of occasions when groups of primary-age boys have got girls in a corner and tried to touch them. There are also cases where a girl, perhaps because she has been sexually abused, will tend to re-enact what happened to her and will encourage boys to touch her. Sexual expression gets entangled with violence. Once boys reach nine or ten, they find themselves having constantly to prove themselves, demonstrate their masculinity, to impress their all-important peer group. "Boys may need to show that they don't need girls, particularly if they are not very successful with them," says David Warden, a child psychologist at Strathclyde University. "These unsuccessful boys are the most likely to get aggressive in an effort to gain at least the support of their male peers." Both boys and girls explore how, by using cruelty, they can gain power over people. Among girls, says Dr Warden, it's more likely to be verbal cruelty, undermining a boy's self-esteem, calling him a wimp. The boys are more likely to hit out.

Amid all this, there is great confusion.

A child will report that a boy and a girl are having sex, when all that happened was that they were chatting. Children will use words without understanding what they are saying. Adults will get the full meaning and be shocked, which is, perhaps, exactly what the child wants.

Some of this is new. Children hear much more about sex than they did in the past. It's on every television channel. It is enough to be literate and to open a newspaper – at once you gain access to an adult world. All this makes playground language much more robust. But those who work with children say that, for all the information they gain through the media about sex, young people have the same old difficulties of making sense of it all.

Boys face particular difficulties. Not only do they often grow up in a highly competitive, bullying context at school, a culture in which it is *de rigueur* to hold girls in disdain from the ages of seven or eight, so as to prove yourself a "real man". Boys also grow up in isolation from proper support in their sexual development. At primary school, children learn the parts of the body through the science curriculum. But this focus on reproductive techniques tends to engage girls more than boys, according to the Sex Education Forum, which has organised government-funded seminars on the deficiencies of provision for boys. The stuff about relationships, social skills and morality can easily be squeezed out by the demands of the national curriculum, says Gill Lenderyou, the forum's

co-ordinator. Meanwhile, at home, mothers tend to talk more to their daughters than to their sons about sexuality, and fathers are reluctant to raise the issue at all.

Part of the problem is that boys are not seen as having an obvious stage of development equivalent to girls' menstruating. But another factor is that sex education is partly a response to fears. Parents are still less worried about what a son gets up to than about the possibility of a daughter becoming pregnant. Boys are less likely to learn about sex from informed sources such as health professionals because they are unlikely to attend a young person's clinic in the first place.

What all this adds up to in these supposedly enlightened times is a generation of boys who are largely cast adrift by the adult world as they try to make sense of their sexual identity. These are boys who will face considerable peer pressure to lose their virginity and who, unless offered other guidance, will learn much of what they know about sex from pornography.

Interesting solutions are being pioneered. Some primary schools now provide puberty sessions for boys. Others have invited fathers into school for sessions with their sons to discuss the boys' feelings about sexuality. This is a start. But there is a long way to go. If we fail to support boys properly, we should not be surprised that many take their sexual confusions into adulthood and that the early lives of a few are marked by sexual horror stories.

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BCCI fraudster jailed for record 14 years and fined £3m

Kim Sengupta

Abbas Kasimili Gokal, the world's biggest fraudster, yesterday received the longest jail sentence ever handed down by a British court for fraud. The biggest ever orders for compensation and legal costs in a fraud case were also made against him.

Gokal, the man in the centre of the collapse of the Bank of Credit & Commerce International, was jailed for 14 years at the Old Bailey. The defendant, who had fought his case on legal aid, was also told to pay £2.94m in compensation from his personal assets within two years or face a further three years in prison.

The judge also agreed to a prosecution request that the costs of £4.3m for the 125-day trial should be awarded against the disgraced Pakistani shipping magnate. However, the enforcement of this order was stayed until further assets held by Gokal could be traced. The Serious

Fraud Office believes that he has £100m secreted abroad.

Mr Justice Buxton said that he was satisfied that Gokal, subsidised by the British taxpayer during the case, had more than enough funds to bankroll his own defence. But he added they did not wish to pass any comments on the "appropriateness" of the defendant being given funds by the Legal Aid Board.

Gokal, 61, had been convicted of fraud involving \$1.2bn (£740m) in loans from the corrupt Bank. He was a close friend of Hassan Abedi, the bank's founder, and had been the biggest single borrower before banking authorities shut down BCCI in 1992 following the discovery of fraud to the value of \$20bn.

As he was being led down to the cells the former tycoon, a tall, silver-haired slightly stooping figure in a navy chalk striped suit, white shirt, black and white patterned tie, smiled and waved at his wife Rukaiya, and daughter Sukaiya in the public

gallery. The court had been told that Gokal, who had claimed he was penniless, had been giving them and other members of the family "gifts" in an attempt to avoid paying financial penalties.

Mr Justice Buxton said he was taking the defendant's age into account, as well as the fact he had spent almost three years in custody since his arrest at Frankfurt in 1994 in deciding his sentence. But he was scathing in his condemnation of Gokal's criminal career, and the "lying and untrue defence" he had put forward.

The judge said: "I am wholly satisfied that you are an intelligent, sophisticated and unscrupulous man who put the interests of yourself and your family before all else.

"These were not victimless crimes. First the fraudulent conduct of a major international bank, BCCI, and the concealment from its auditors and regulators of its insecure financial position, all of which you



Abbas Gokal: Convicted of fraud involving £740m in bank loans

helped and facilitated, created a serious threat to the integrity of the whole international banking system.

"Secondly, one of the main objectives of the conspiracies was to conceal the true position of BCCI enabling it to continue to take funds from depositors. The victims of that

were those who have lost a large part of their investments and in some cases a large part of their life savings.

They trusted the bank with their money, as you know they would. Other depositors were public bodies, including local authorities, who although not ruined by the collapse of BCCI have found their activities seriously restricted, and thus the interests of the inhabitants of their area seriously damaged by losing their deposit.

He added: "You have shown not the slightest apology or remorse for these massive frauds or for the damage and loss that your conspiracies have caused to many thousands of innocent people.

"I have not the slightest doubt that, with the cynical calculation that has characterised all your dealings, you put forward a lying and untrue defence, because you hoped that the complicated nature of the fraudulent agreement that you had made, and the skill with which you have sought to cover your tracks, would cause

such difficulty in proving the case against you in court that you would evade justice.

The judge added that in his view "an improper and dishonest relationship" existed between Gokal and the BCCI founder, Abedi, from the very beginning. As early as 1975 the pair were involved in illicit activities, and together created a "miasma of false documentation and accounts."

Anthony Hacking QC, the prosecutor, told the court that Gokal had operated "behind a wall of mirrors", concealing a network of "money laundering, and sophisticated and devious fraud". He added that the defendant was "incapable of giving truthful evidence".

After sentencing, Chris Dickson, a senior SFO lawyer said: "This was one of the most complex investigations ever mounted by us. We had to send investigators to every continent to gather evidence because Gokal insisted on pleading not guilty. We also had to call witnesses from

80 different countries. We are convinced that a huge amount of money is still hidden abroad. This is no consolation to thousands of investors, many of them small businessmen who have lost everything."

The collapse of BCCI in 1991 led to financial disaster for depositors, including public bodies. The Western Isles Council lost £23m, Westminster City Council was owed £3.5m and Harlow Council in Essex £4.5m. One of the biggest single losers was the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi who lost £312m.

Gokal, charged on two counts of conspiring to defraud, was sentenced to four years on the first count and 10 years on count two, the sentences to be served consecutively.

In 1994 liquidators for BCCI obtained a High Court order for £830m against Gokal. Yesterday, at the Old Bailey, Mr Justice Buxton said: "It seems quite clear to me that Mr Gokal has not the slightest intention of complying with any court order."

BT to get early release from ban on broadcast TV

Cathy Newman

The Government is to start early talks with British Telecom aimed at allowing the telephone giant to move swiftly into entertainment broadcasting.

Any such dispensation would end the long-standing ban on BT broadcasting entertainment across its telephone network, a restriction it has claimed has prevented it from investing billions of pounds in high-capacity fibre optic cables.

In an interview with *The Independent*, Chris Smith, the National Heritage Secretary, yesterday indicated Labour would fulfil the promise it made in opposition two years ago, that BT would be allowed to compete with the cable television industry sooner than 2001 when the ban is due to be reviewed. In return he would expect BT

to fulfil its pledge to connect schools, hospitals and libraries to the so-called information superhighway free of charge.

He said his department and the Department of Trade and Industry would talk to BT about the proposals in "the near future". Mr Smith added: "We did set out a couple of years ago a set of proposals that enabled BT to have access to an entertainment market on a somewhat faster time scale than is envisaged in the current legislation. Those proposals are still on the page, so to speak. We'd want to begin discussions in the relatively near future."

Under the agreement, Mr Smith said BT would be committed to developing a "broadband network as near to nationwide as we could achieve". He estimated that such a project could cost BT as

much as £10bn, though the company has previously said this would total £15bn. It currently invests some £2bn a year.

A BT spokesman said yesterday: "This reaffirms Labour's commitment to the findings of the Trade and Industry Select Committee which said the ban should be lifted earlier."

However, the news will upset the cable companies and could lead to conflict with the industry regulator, Don Cruickshank. Both have argued that the ban was the only way to encourage rival operators to invest billions of pounds in developing networks. There are also question marks over BT's commitment to invest heavily in laying fibre optic cables to homes. Last year it experimented with a television service to 2,500 homes down its existing copper phone wires, but the digital technology needed to make it work is expensive.

Referring to the development of digital television, Mr Smith said the Government had a more "pro-active" role to play. While he would not be drawn on specific policies, he commented:

"We do need to put some thought into how digital television is being promoted by the Government and what sort of access people are going to have to it."

He said he would be formulating proposals within the next few months, and added: "My aim will be to find the best possible ways of ensuring that ordinary people sitting at home can have the quickest and cheapest access to digital television technology. We have to set the parameters of public policy in a way that enables that access to be achieved."

He also said that he had no immediate intention of relaxing cross-media ownership legislation, contrary to some expectations.

Telewest delays joint venture with CWC

The race to launch the first digital interactive television service slowed yesterday when the UK's two largest cable operators revealed they may delay the start of their planned joint service by up to six months, writes Chris Godsmark.

The move follows this week's news that British Interactive Broadcasting (BIB), the digital satellite venture involving British Telecom and BSkyB, will not reach consumers until spring next year. Graham Wallace, chief executive of Cable & Wireless Communications, and Stephen Davidson, chief executive of Telewest, have discussed postponing their digital cable service from the planned start date of October or November, to coincide with Sky's launch.

Mr Wallace said yesterday: "Given that the external

competitive environment has changed we're looking at whether we should change our timetable. We certainly won't launch after Sky though," Mr Davidson said a full launch in the autumn was now just one of several possible options. "We've only had 24 hours to absorb the news from BIB. It may be prudent to have an early but smaller trial launch to work out whether the systems are right."

BIB had hoped to begin broadcasting up to 200 digital entertainment, shopping and information channels this year but was hit by delays to the launch of a new Astra satellite.

Telewest also cast doubt on whether BIB set-top boxes, which decode programmes, would work with cable. BIB claimed an additional component would allow cable access.



Unlikely alliance: Noel Edmonds (left) and the biotechnology entrepreneur Chris Evans

Photograph: FT

Magnus Grimond

Noel Edmonds signs deal with Toad

An unlikely alliance between Noel Edmonds, the former disc jockey, and Chris Evans, the Welsh biotechnology entrepreneur (rather than the other former disc jockey), was sealed yesterday with the ambitious aim of bringing the virtues of the in-car office and other hi-tech gizmos for drivers to nearly a third of the population.

In a deal worth up to £600,000 in shares, Mr Edmonds, now better known for his television *House Party* at Crinkly Bottom, will spearhead a campaign to raise the awareness of Mr Evans' Toad products, which saw its shares crash in February after the sudden departure of its chief executive, Charles Parker.

Mr Edmonds' Unique Group, which takes in his broadcasting to marketing interests, is selling the Challenge Technology Partnership, a consultancy operation, to Toad. Challenge claims to have signed up several big car companies to develop hi-tech products such as an external camera to deter perpetrators of road rage attacks and an in-car video conferencing system.

Unique will receive an initial payment of 500,000 shares, valued at £205,000 at Toad's share price of 41p, up 15p yesterday, payable from Mr Evans' personal 20 per cent stake in the group.

cent or 80,000 would represent tens of millions [of pounds] in sales.

Mr Edmonds will be personally promoting Toad products at motor shows and the company would be "popping up in lots of high profile places," Mr Evans said.

This was all part of the Toad chairman's commitment after February's "blip" to "really put this company back on the fast track" over the next 12 months.

The link up with Mr Edmonds had already won new accounts with big fleet users, he said, and it would now result in an acceleration of the launch of Toad's new Active car-locating system, previously scheduled for the end of next year.

He reiterated that the company was on course for profitability next year.

CWC set to cut 500 jobs in initial overhaul

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Cable & Wireless Communications, the recently formed cable TV and telephony giant, is about to cut hundreds of managerial jobs as it merges the administrative operations of the four companies which joined to form the new venture.

The company has advertised 80 senior jobs in a first layer of management below the executive board and confirmed yesterday that it had received 300 internal applications, though some had come from staff on lower grades. Once the round of appointments is completed a further three larger management layers will be advertised inside the group. The aim is for each layer of management to organise the selection process for the next layer.

One source said the process was likely to result in a total of 500 job cuts because there were far more applicants than jobs available. CWC was created out of the landmark merger, announced last year, of Cable & Wireless's Mercury subsidiary with three cable operators, Nynex CableComms, Bell Cablemedia and Videotron. CWC shares began trading last month.

The job cuts, which will take place later this year, will almost certainly result in generous redundancy payments. The four companies have offered staff so-called "loyalty bonuses" if they stay in their posts until the process is completed.

Graham Wallace, chief executive, said the selection process had been "totally fair and above board". He added: "This layer of staff will be in place by the end of May and from 1 June we will move on to the next layer. The bulk of the staff are incredibly motivated to make this work. We're doing it in a rigorous and fair way and we've been very open about it."

Mr Wallace also cast doubt on claims that the total job cuts across the group would rise to 2,000 once call centres and network control buildings were merged or closed. The process is expected to take much longer than the initial administrative job cuts.

He said overall staff numbers for the group may not fall much below their current level of 12,500. "This could be a non-issue. We are looking at expanding sales and marketing functions so you can't conclude that overall numbers will fall. The expansion could more than offset the reductions."

Hollick invests £120m in bid for digital terrestrial licence

Lord Hollick's United News & Media is joining Digital Television Network, one of two bidders for the licence to run digital terrestrial television, with a promised investment of £120m over four years.

United has always been part of DTN's planning submission to the Independent Television Commission, but until

now it has not been financially involved in the bid.

It was unclear last night whether Lord Hollick's late commitment of funds could make any difference to the ITC's deliberations, which are already well advanced.

The ITC is expected to award the licences by early next month. DTN has so far been widely

regarded in the City as the outsider, with most analysts expecting all three multiplex licences to go to the rival British Digital Broadcasting, a consortium of BSkyB, Carlton and Granada.

Bids for the licences had to be in by the end of January and in theory could not be altered in any way thereafter.

None the less, the addition of United will be seen as a big boost for DTN, which had appeared to lack the financial and industrial credibility of the rival bidder. DTN's only backer until yesterday was NTL, the television transmission business owned by International CableTel. Other potential partners, including Merryll Lynch and

NaWest, dropped out before the bid was submitted.

Barclay Knapp, chief executive of NTL, said he was confident the late involvement of United would not be ruled out of court.

"The bid is still as it was when we submitted it on 31 January, but United will become a 30 per cent shareholder in DTN if we are successful," Mr Knapp said.

BDB did not return calls last night but was widely believed to be considering an appeal.

One analyst said: "It's all very well for DTN to say the bid as submitted to the ITC has not been changed, but the ITC cannot fail to take this latest development into account. It's a crazy move."

There has been speculation

that the licence might be split, with two of the multiplexes on offer going to DTN and one to BSkyB.

This is believed to be the approach most favoured by the Government, which is concerned about BSkyB extending its present near-monopoly of subscription television on to rival platforms.

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Yield (%)	Index	Close	Day's change
FTSE 100	4580.40	+42.90	+0.9	4580.40	4056.60	3.54	Nikkei	14562.00	+100.00
FTSE 250	4519.40	-8.60	-0.2	4729.40	4468.40	3.58	Dow Jones	8000.00	+10.00
FTSE 350	2226.20	+15.90	+0.7	2226.20	2017.90	3.55			
FTSE SmallCap	2301.60	-3.25	-0.1	2374.20	2178.29	3.03			
FTSE All-Share	2188.75	+14.26	+0.7	2188.75	1988.78	3.51			
New York	7187.19	+101.54	+1.4	7225.32	5032.94	1.73			
Hong Kong	20061.81	+12.91	+0.1	20180.92	17303.85	0.80			
Frankfurt	13740.30	+134.39	+1.0	13888.24	12055.17	3.12			
				3568.28	2848.77	1.52			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling	UK medium gilt	US long bond	Money Market Rates	Bond Yields	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	30 Year
UK	5.25	5.88	7.06	8.17	7.13	8.27			
US	5.72	6.34	6.75	6.87	6.95	7.08			
Japan	0.43	0.84	2.51	2.55					
Germany	3.09	3.31		6.51	6.54				

CURRENCIES									
£/\$	£/DM	£/¥	Pound	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago	Dollar	Yesterday	Change
\$ (London)	1.6207	-1.58	1.5182	£ (London)	0.6170	-0.59	0.6596	¥ (London)	0.6171
\$ (New York)	1.6205	-1.65	1.5243	£ (New York)	0.6171	-0.62	0.6596	¥ (New York)	0.6171
DM (London)	2.7673	-4.65	2.3019	DM (London)	1.7075	-1.19	1.5183		
¥ (London)	200.628	-3.68	159.545	¥ (London)	123.795	-71.05	105.230		
£ Index	98.8	-1.5	84.1	£ Index	104.8	-0.4	96.2		

Kwik Save to spend £18m on consultants

Kwik Save, the beleaguered discount supermarket group, will pay £18m in consultancy fees over the next two years as it conducts a radical overhaul of the ailing business, writes Nigel Cope.

Most of the fees will be paid to Anderson Consulting, which was called in by Kwik Save last year to undertake a strategic review. The firm will be paid £7m this year. "It seems Andersen are running the business," one analyst said.

The costs were revealed as Kwik Save announced a poor set of figures for the first half

with flat underlying profits, a sharp fall in sales and declining customer numbers.

The shares fell 17p to 291p, close to their five-year low, as the market took fright at the company's current trading statement. This showed same store sales in the seven weeks are 6 per cent lower than the same period last year.

"It's pretty horrendous," said Frank Davidson, food retail analyst at ABN Amro Hoare Gorton. "I think they are in a vicious circle of decline. There are deep structural problems."

Investment column, page 24



COMMENT

The fabulous real returns they have enjoyed on equities over the past 10 years hardly support the case for an extra top-up, courtesy of other taxpayers'

Pension funds defend a skewed playing field

The pension funds are getting in early in warning the new Government not to meddle, as well they should, for abolition of the tax credit enjoyed by pension funds on dividend income is an obvious and very probable target for Labour. Having been taken unawares by Norman Lamont four years ago, when he raised £1bn by reducing the ACT rate from 25 to 20 per cent, they are not about to roll over without a well-orchestrated fight.

At stake is the £4bn annually of tax on dividend income that gross funds are able to claim back from the Government. Because the companies that pay the tax are able to offset this advance payment against subsequent corporation tax bills, the only loser in the current system is the Government.

Actually the loss of revenue in the last 12 months has probably been a great deal more, thanks to the flood of special dividends, share buy-backs and other ingenious wheezes the City has dreamt up to feg over the Treasury. If the penny has finally dropped in Whitehall, it is arguable that the City has only itself to blame.

For all its bluster, the NAPF doesn't really have a credible argument against the reforms. The tax credit, designed with the admittedly worthy aim of encouraging retirement savings, represents a severe skewing of the playing field on which pension funds compete with other forms of saving via equities.

The NAPF claim that the abolition of ACT would reduce the real return on shares is also more apparent than actual if you

believe figures from PPFM which suggest the scrapping of tax relief would only reduce the inflation-adjusted return by about 0.75 per cent. Furthermore, the fabulous real returns pension funds have enjoyed on equities over the past 10 years hardly support the case for an extra top-up, courtesy of other taxpayers.

Perhaps the only sensible argument against tampering with the system is that companies facing a reduction in the value of their pension funds would be forced to top them up, thus reducing their taxable profits and lowering the tax take through general corporation tax. What the Government takes with one hand it could be forced to give back with the other. Again, the likely effect here is probably exaggerated by the industry.

Set against this is the self-evident truism that the fiscal privilege accorded the pension funds encourages companies to over-distribute their profits at the expense of long-term investment. There is no incentive to keep money within a business taxed at 33 per cent when the marginal rate for dividend payments is only 13 per cent. The effect of the present system, therefore, is to favour short-term indirect investment over long-term direct investment. This is a philosophical justification for abolition added to the more practical one of raising revenue.

The new Chancellor would none the less be unwise to view this pleasing coincidence of purpose as proving the case. At the very

least, the abolition or phasing out of dividend tax credits ought to be balanced by matching reductions in corporate tax to provide real incentive to direct investment. Ideally there should be a quite lengthy and wide-ranging review of the whole system of corporation tax. But then this is a Chancellor in a hurry and with a pressing need for revenue.

Don't rule us out of rejoining ERM

A body by declaring the Bank of England independent one morning probably would be capable of deciding to take Britain back into the exchange rate mechanism before breakfast the next day. That, at least, seems to have been the reasoning of those traders in the currency markets who accepted the rumour that sterling was about to re-enter the ERM at a rate of DM2.50. After all, the Labour government has been cosying up to the Europeans all week.

The Treasury scotched the rumour, but the fact that it was neither true nor plausible yesterday does not mean that it never will be. Gordon Brown said earlier this week that the UK was very unlikely to join the first wave of the single currency. That means the question of sterling's relationship to the euro will need to be resolved, and it seems very possible that the Government will join the

ERM version two planned for "outs". This will not be the ERM as we knew it at the time of our national humiliation in 1992. Sterling would be linked at an agreed rate to the composite euro, rather than being rushed in at an inappropriate rate against the German mark. Furthermore, the permissible bands of variation would be much wider than they were up to 1992. British membership would be seen as a signal of honourable intentions towards eventual membership of the single currency, so sterling would be supported by intervention from the European Central Bank if necessary. And what could be more appealing than the ERM when Britain takes over the presidency of the Commission on 1 January?

After all, the UK will be overseeing the process of deciding which other members qualify for the euro despite being one of the countries least likely to want to join.

Labour dances on the bones of Clarke's PFI

Poor old Kenneth Clarke. Labour is truly dancing on his bones. Not content with consigning the Ken and Eddie show to the dustbin of history, Gordon Brown has now taken the shears to another of the former Chancellor's pet projects, the Private Finance Initiative.

Henceforth, Whitehall will no longer

have to test its capital spending plans against the PFI to get the go-ahead. Before the mandarins gleefully take out their cheque books, however, there is one small snag. Nor will there be any more public money to finance their wish lists. In fact there will be less. Mr Brown and his Paymaster General, Geoffrey Robinson, have stuck rigidly to one thing they inherited from Mr Clarke and that is his last set of Red Book forecasts showing a continuing decline in the capital budget and a rising curve of PFI projects. So much for the pretence that the PFI was ever going to be anything other than an excuse for substituting public money with private funds.

The abolition of the universal testing rule nevertheless makes sense. The PFI was becoming so cluttered that deserving cases, such as hospital projects, were in danger of dying before they got out of the waiting room.

By keeping the choke collar in place around the capital budget, the Paymaster General has left Whitehall with an incentive to dream up more PFI projects. The problem he is left with, however, is finding a mechanism to sort the wheat from the chaff. Mr Robinson has asked Malcolm Bates, a one-time member of Harold Wilson's Industrial Reorganisation Corporation (remember that?) to come up with the solution. All contributions will be gratefully received, particularly since Mr Bates has been asked to report back in just a month.

Labour acts quickly to change PFI review rules

Michael Harrison

The Government yesterday launched a lightning review of the Private Finance Initiative and, as a first step, scrapped the rule that all Whitehall spending projects have to be tested against the PFI before being allowed to proceed.

The review will be conducted by Malcolm Bates, chairman of Premier Farnell and the insurance group Pearl, who has been asked to report back to the Paymaster General Geoffrey Robinson, by 13 June. Business leaders have welcomed the announcement.

Mr Robinson said the aim of the review would be to see how the PFI could best be streamlined and what obstacles there were to bringing projects to fruition.

In the meantime, he said he was kicking over the first obstacle by ending the requirement for universal testing of projects against the PFI. However, Mr Robinson said this did not mean that government departments should expect any increase in their own budgets for

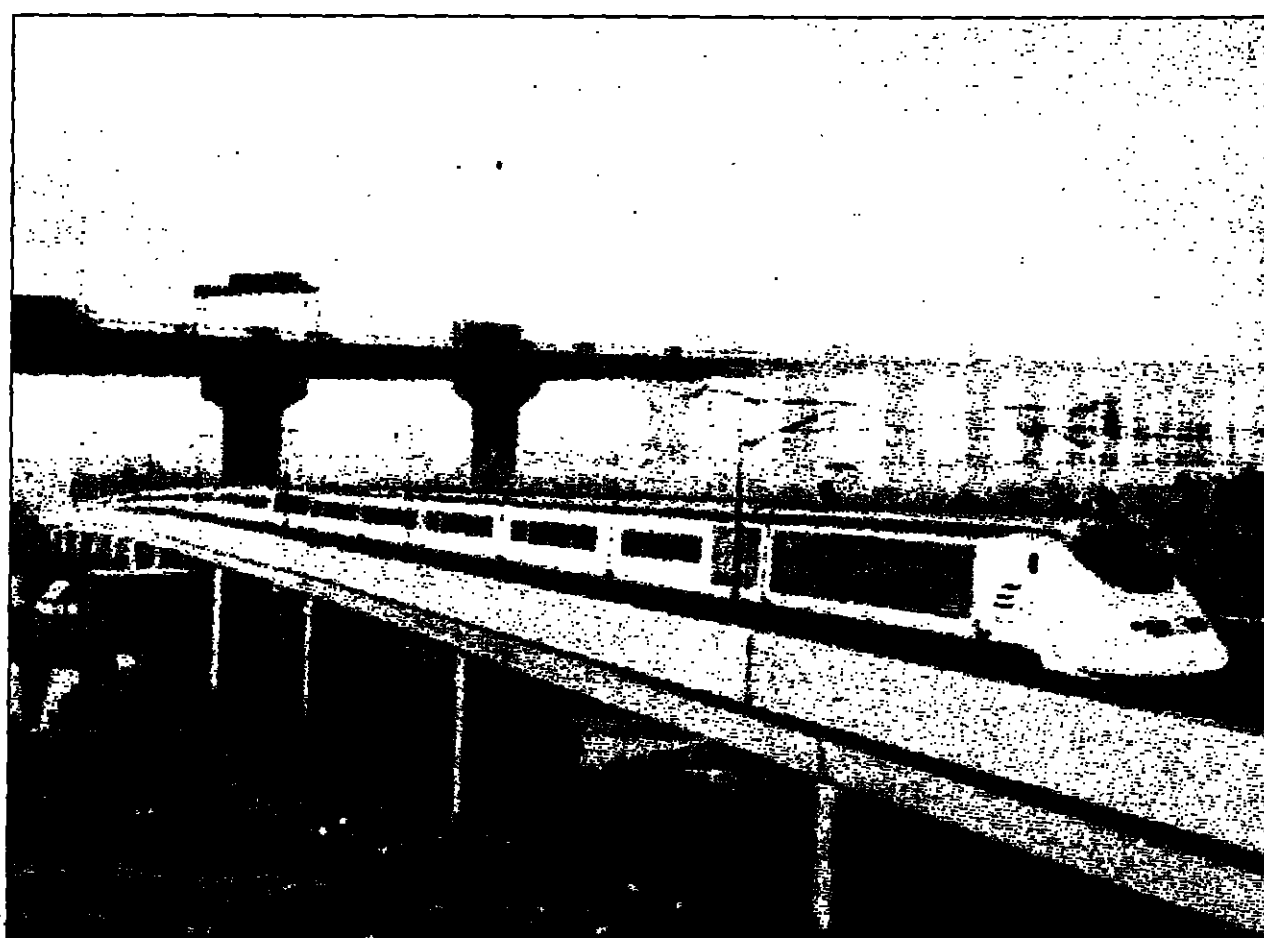
capital projects. Labour is sticking to the capital spending controls it inherited from the Conservatives which show a £3bn decline in capital budgets by the end of the decade.

The universal testing rule was introduced two years ago by the former Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, in an attempt to kick-start the initiative. Since then, however, it has been widely criticised, not least by the Confederation of British Industry, for clogging up the system and delaying approval for important projects, particularly in the health field.

The CBI recommended that projects costing less than £10m should be exempted from this particular requirement.

Mr Robinson said the rule was "a recipe for frustration and delay and works against the concept of prioritisation which we want to build into the process".

So far £1.1bn worth of contracts have been given the go-ahead under the PFI although a large proportion of that total is accounted for by a handful of projects such as the £3.5bn Channel Tunnel rail link. More



The line to private finance: An artist's impression of a Eurostar international train emerging from the Essex side of the tunnel to be built under the Thames as part of the Channel Tunnel rail link, which has won £3.5bn of PFI funding

than 1,400 projects have been identified by Whitehall departments as PFI candidates. However, only about 10 per cent of these involve investment of more than £10m.

The review will examine the role that could best be played by a new public-private sector taskforce working within the Treasury and reporting direct to the Paymaster General. It will also examine the effectiveness

of the Private Finance Panel, the full-time body set up to administer the PFI, and what "generic obstacles" to progress there are.

In its Business Manifesto, Labour set out a 12-point plan for reforming the PFI. Under this, deals already signed would be allowed to proceed but every other potential partnership would be subjected to more rigorous appraisal to avoid long de-

partmental "wish lists" appearing.

Labour also pledged to draw up new guidelines on tendering for partnership projects in consultation with the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission.

The CBI welcomed Mr Robinson's announcement. Charles Cox, chairman of its public procurement and efficiency committee, said: "The

abolition of universal testing is a major policy leap for the PFI. We are pleased that the Government has accepted that not all projects are PFI-able. Now the Government must set realistic PFI targets and adequate capital budgets."

Mr Bates was until recently a director of the Private Finance Panel and was deputy managing director of GEC for 12 years until March this year.

NAPF warns Brown over tax credits

Tom Stevenson
Financial Editor

The National Association of Pension Funds expressed "deep concern" yesterday at the widely held belief that Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was planning to reduce or abolish the tax advantages enjoyed by pension funds.

Speaking at the association's annual conference in Harrogate, Ann Robinson, the NAPF's director general, warned the Government that an assault on the advance corporation tax (ACT) credit that institutions currently claim back from the Treasury would be "ill advised - a serious mistake."

The NAPF is concerned that, having promised not to raise individual income tax rates, the Government will be forced to attack the corporate sector to plug the gaps in the public finances. It is thought the Government might view the investing institutions as a more palatable target than the companies it strenuously wooed in the run-up to the election.

Currently pension funds and other tax-exempt investors receive dividends on which the company has already paid advance corporation tax at a rate of 20 per cent. The funds are able to claim this tax back from the government while the company offsets its advance pay-

ment against subsequent mainstream corporation tax bills, resulting in an overall reduction in the amount of tax collected by the government.

It is a system the NAPF defends because it argues tax is paid on the funds later when pensions are actually drawn by individual pensioners. According to Ms Robinson, "Imposing a tax on dividends to pension funds has the effect of imposing double taxation on individuals."

The cost to the government of returning tax to gross funds is estimated at up to £4bn a year, making it an obvious target for a revenue-hungry government. Four years ago, Norman Lamont reduced the rate at which advanced corporation tax was paid (and refunded) from 25 per cent, raising around £1bn.

The NAPF argues that abolishing or reducing the rebate might be self-defeating because it would mean profitable companies had to divert more of their retained profits into their pension funds to maintain their ability to pay promised pensions. This would lessen the apparent tax benefit to the government by reducing the amount of mainstream corporation tax it could raise from businesses.

Another side effect might be a reduction in the pension fund revenues of local authorities and other public sector employers.

Comment, page 23

ERM rumour trips up sterling

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The pound fell to its lowest level for several weeks yesterday after speculation that the Government planned to take Britain back into the exchange rate mechanism at a rate of DM2.50 briefly swept the currency market.

The Treasury denied the rumour, and investors later bought sterling at the lower level. But its exchange rate against the German mark ended nearly 4 pence lower at just under DM2.77 last night.

The Government has no intention of joining the ERM, a Treasury official said firmly. Some City conspiracy theo-

rists said the unattributed rumour was the ideal way of getting the pound down from its recent, uncomfortable heights. Others said that after this week's surprise announcement about the Bank of England's independence anything was possible.

But Neil Mackinnon, chief economist at Citibank, said: "No new Chancellor wants to be faced with a slide in the currency in his first week in office." He pointed out that the fall yesterday was exaggerated by the fact that most of it took place overnight in New York, where trading in sterling is light.

Alison Correll, an analyst at Paine Webber, said: "This kind of speculation was to be expected. The pound is the last

European currency where there is any scope for it."

Some analysts said that it was plausible that the new Government would want to take Britain back into the exchange rate mechanism, in the new spirit of co-operation with the EU.

But they saw the British presidency of the European Union in the first half of 1998 as the more likely occasion, especially as the Chancellor has all but ruled out British membership of the single currency in the first wave.

Although the ERM rumour was the focus of attention, the pound's welcome weakness yesterday was probably due at least as much to a decline in the

US dollar. It dived against the yen following strong indications that the Japanese authorities will not let the yen fall any further.

The US currency dropped below ¥124 for the first time in a month, compared with its 1 May high of ¥127.50.

Eisuke Sakakibara, a Ministry of Finance official, said yesterday he could foresee the dollar falling to ¥103. It is very unusual for Japanese officials to make such an explicit comment.

"Mr Sakakibara's willingness to depart from the conventions is an indication of how serious the Japanese authorities now are," said Stephen Lewis, chief economist at London Bond Broking.

Diane Coyle
and Michael Harrison

The national shopping spree gathered pace last month, with the volume of sales on the high street expanding at the fastest pace since November.

The results of the Confederation of British Industry's monthly survey backed Gordon Brown's decision to raise interest rates by a quarter-point earlier this week, despite a subdued industrial performance. City experts said yesterday that the economy was still expanding fast enough to require further action, whether through tax or interest rate increases.

"This will keep up the pressure for further tightening of

monetary or fiscal policy in coming months," said Michael Saunders at Salomon Brothers. Industry is keen for taxes to take the strain for fear higher interest rates will keep the pound strong.

British Steel, one of the companies hardest hit by sterling's strengthening, yesterday warned that it was putting 8.5 million jobs at risk.

In a briefing note sent to ministers and MPs in steel constituencies, its chairman, Sir Brian Moffat, called on the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to introduce measures that would help bring sterling down to a "sustainable level" of DM2.40-DM2.50.

The note says that the UK's

policy of controlling inflation largely through interest rates needed to be changed urgently. If sterling remained at current levels, the deterioration in the competitiveness of the UK economy would accelerate.

British Steel repeated the call by the CBI for a balanced approach to inflation, using both interest rates and fiscal measures aimed at those sectors of the economy where inflationary pressures were evident.

Separately, industrial conglomerate BTR became the latest victim of the pound, warning exchange rates had knocked £35m off operating profits in the first half of the year.

Highlighting the contrasting fortunes of exporters and con-

sumers, the CBI reported in its distributive trades survey yesterday that the annual rate of increase in retail sales volumes in April was the highest since November, and expected to continue into May.

The balance of retailers reporting sales volumes higher rather than lower than a year ago was 42 per cent, up from 33 per cent in March and 32 per cent a year earlier.

The sharpest rises were in furniture and carpets, and clothing, with footwear sales also strong. Motor traders also reported an increase in annual sales volumes, confounding downbeat expectations after a drop in March.

BTR profit warning, page 24

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£1.5bn wiped off BTR shares after warning

Magnus Grimond

BTR, the engineering and packaging conglomerate, yesterday saw £1.5bn knocked off its market value after shattering investors' confidence with its fourth profit warning in three years. The group, which Ian Strachan, the new chief executive, has been struggling to revitalise since the beginning of last year, said the effect of sterling's strength in the first half would be to wipe £35m from operating profits.

Although he said the impact would be lessened in the second six months of the year, he warned that the group's problems extended beyond currency to economic problems around the world, particularly in Germany and Australia which account for 30 per cent of sales. Analysis immediately slashed profit forecasts for the current year by 10-15 per cent and the

shares slumped 36.5p to close at 231p. Further pressure was piled on the stock as it became clear that one large investor had unloaded 80 million shares at well below the market price.

SBC Warburg is thought to have handled the placing in a bought deal, buying the stake at 215p a share and selling on at 219p. The bank refused to comment, other than to say it had been a two-way trader in the stock yesterday.

Geoff Allum, a conglomerate analyst at Henderson Crosthwaite, the stockbrokers, described the latest news as "pretty awful". He has sliced a tenth from his previous profits forecast, leaving a pre-tax figure of £1.22bn for this year, and said the market had previously been prepared to give BTR the benefit of the doubt. The burden of proof had shifted to the company. "The market will now expect the worst."



Pressure: Ian Strachan says problems extend beyond currency to struggling economies

Addressing shareholders at the company's annual meeting yesterday, Mr Strachan maintained that the restructuring strategy unveiled last year remained on track. The divestment programme was 80 per cent complete, acquisitions were in hand and over 50 restructuring projects were being pursued. "It is... my firm expectation

that the underlying performance of the group's continuing businesses will improve steadily as our strategy is implemented, and that attractive returns will be generated in the years ahead."

BTR said its warning was based on trading in the first four months of the year, with the difficulties in Germany likely to spill over into the rest of Europe. Underlying sales, excluding currency effects, will be ahead in the first half, although operating profits will fall, with performance picking up again in the second half of 1997.

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN EDITED BY MAGNUS GRIMOND

Kwik Save feeling heat in kitchen as store sales crumble

Just when things look really bad for Kwik Save, they up and get even worse. Britain's biggest discount supermarket insisted six months ago that this was not a business on its knees, despite the announcement of huge job losses, store closures and a collapse in profits. Management insisted then, as now, that Kwik Save's squeezed market position, between the big four supermarket chains and the Continental "hard" discounters is not untenable. Investors must soon start to seriously question if any of these claims are true.

Yesterday's disguised profits warning contained enough signs to suggest that this is a business in long-term decline. And the shares fell another 17p to 291p.

The main worry is that the group's sales seem to be crumbling. Same-store sales fell by 1.6 per cent in the first half, but have nose-dived by 6 per cent in the seven weeks since the period end in mid-March. Management blames a third of the fall on an unflattering comparison with a strong period in the previous year, when sales were boosted by the price war on commodity items, which cut the price of baked beans to 3p a can. Even so, that still leaves a 4 per cent real decline.

Other indicators are equally worrying. Customer numbers fell by 3 per cent on last year. The average value of transactions declined by a similar amount. Kwik Save's punchy Australian chief executive, Graeme Bowler, points to a 1 per cent increase in margins as evidence that competitive pressure is easing and management is taking a firm grip on theft and waste. But in the long run the City is less interested in margins and more in building the sales line.

Kwik Save is making much of the launch of its own-brand range last month, with 150 more lines to come. This is a welcome move but, again, is more about building margins than driving sales.

Mr Bowler has nailed his colours to the mast with a stated aim of pushing the sales figures into, at worst, neutral and, with luck, positive territory by the year-end.

Managers do not usually make promises unless they are fairly certain of being able

to fulfil them, but his one may come back to haunt him.

There ought to be a place in the market for a discount operation, but it is worth pointing out that as the big four supermarket groups scoop up market share, Kwik Save is not the only one feeling the heat. The other division two players, such as Somerfield, Iceland and William Morrison, are also struggling to build sales and have been concentrating instead on margin growth.

Assuming analysts' forecasts of £72m for the full year are met, Kwik Save shares trade on a lowly forward rating of 10. But they should still be avoided.

McAlpine deal raises doubts

Alfred McAlpine, the construction group, yesterday put investors out of their misery by unveiling the £42m terms of its takeover of Raine, its much troubled rival. The reaction was predictably negative, with McAlpine's shares slumping 13.5p to 153.5p after it accompanied the announcement with news of a two-for-seven rights call at 142p to raise £28.9m. McAlpine is offering 0.146 of its own shares for every one in Raine, valuing the latter at 22.4p.

The agreed deal, revealed last month, has plenty of industrial logic. The combination

of the two groups' social housing businesses will create a market leader, delivering something like 1,400 units a year. That should be a growth business if Labour fulfils its pledge to revitalise the sector.

But the takeover hangs over the management of private housing, which forms the backbone of both businesses. Although McAlpine's profits there slumped 20 per cent to £9.1m on turnover of £187m last year, the group should be capable of turning in margins of at least 10 per cent, based on the performance of better placed rivals. McAlpine's housebuilding side and Raine's Hassall Homes should give combined turnover of around £320m, suggesting underlying profits of at least £30m are in sight, more than double the 1996 figure.

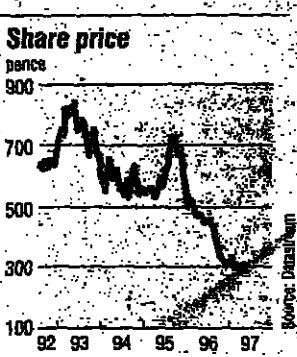
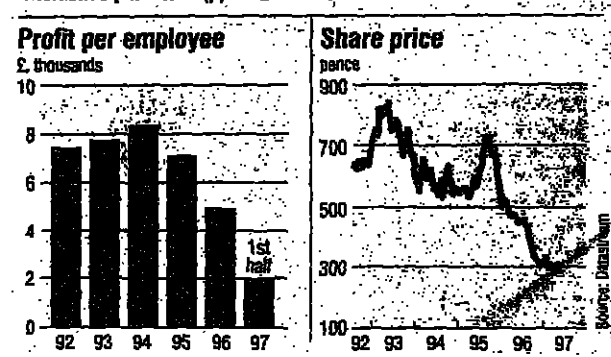
The McAlpine management will get a fair wind from merger savings. Up to 300 jobs could go as Raine after the closure of four overlapping housing offices and the group head office. Analysts guess the potential savings could be as much as £6m.

But Raine is in effect being bought from its bankers, following a bail out in 1995, and McAlpine shareholders are still smarting from the last rights in 1994 at 205p a share. If the group can achieve £30m, the shares stand on a forward p/e of 9, but the management has a lot to prove. Unattractive.

Kwik Save: At a glance

Market value: £452.7m, share price 281p

	1994	1995	1996	1997
Trading record				
Turnover (£bn)	2.20	2.35	2.29	2.17
Pre-tax profits (£m)	138.6	125.5	2.8	44.2
Earnings per share (p)	57.29	51.68	14.61	16.25
Dividends per share (p)	19.25	20.0	20.0	5.95



Body Shop plans ad blitz to lift UK sales

Nigel Cole
City Correspondent

Body Shop International, the campaigning toiletries retailer, will launch its first really big UK advertising campaign later this year. It will be designed to boost sales of planned new product launches and help lift UK sales which have been poor. Body Shop has typically spurned the use of advertising in favour of campaigning public relations initiatives often led by founder Anita Roddick. Most of

the group's previous advertising moves have been relatively limited affairs, mostly in the United States where the company has also been struggling.

Angela Bawtree, head of investor relations, said: "It won't be a huge television campaign with slots during News at Ten. It will mostly be a print campaign." She declined to put a value on the move.

The announcement came as Body Shop disappointed the City with poor sales figures and news that last year's prof-

its had been hit by a heavy charge for re-structuring its struggling French operation.

The company has taken a £6.5m charge related to the business which has been battling against weak demand and high rental costs. The write-off will cover loans to the head franchise operator and the company is seeking a new franchisee.

"The stores were affected by the bombs of last year and sales didn't recover," says Ms Bawtree. "The franchisee was not in a position to invest fur-

ther. We didn't want to take the stores over as we feel they should be run by a French operator. We are in talks with various potential replacements."

The shares fell 2p to 188.5p as analysts digested a 2 per cent fall in like-for-like sales in current trading across the group. Though the British stores are showing 3 per cent growth after a flat period last year, sales in the US are 4 per cent lower.

The company appointed a new US chief executive last September and has been im-

proving its product packaging and stores to suit an American audience. "We knew it was going to take time but we are confident we are moving in the right direction," Ms Bawtree said.

Group profits, excluding exceptional items, were 17 per cent higher at £38.2m in the year to 1 March. The dividend has been increased by 38 per cent to 4.7p a share, in line with the company's plans to adopt a progressive policy on the payout. The company also has £25.2m of net cash.

IN BRIEF

Midland set to buy Echo Press

Midland Independent Newspapers plans to acquire Echo Press for £3.7m. In his address to the annual general meeting, Sir Norman Fowler, chairman, said that group trading in the first quarter had been "promising" with advertising revenue up and the cost of newspaper down. He said the group was committed to a three-point strategy to deliver benefits to shareholders - expanding the newspaper division by acquisition and by launching more titles; adding to the range of specialist magazines and exhibitions; and developing new media services. He said Echo Press published the *Loughborough Echo*, a weekly paid-for newspaper, and six associated titles which complemented the group's Midlands franchise.

Romtec profits increase

Romtec announced an increase in annual pre-tax profits from £257,000 to £326,000, accompanied by a 1.5p dividend. Russ Nathan, chairman, said: "The company's intention is to continue specialising in the IT and telecoms sector. This market has enabled rapid growth to be achieved and continues to offer scope for continuing growth both in our range of products and services and in geographic coverage." Last year overseas turnover increased by 37 per cent to £1.6m. Exports now account for 34 per cent of revenues, compared with 31 per cent in the previous year.

Rentokil sells cranes division for £8m

Rentokil Initial has sold the large cranes division of its ex-BET subsidiary, Graydon White and Sparrow, to Sarens of Belgium, for £8m. The deal includes the sale of four large cranes and the transfer of 25 operating personnel. It has an annual turnover of £4m and net tangible assets of £6m. Profit on the sale will be £600,000.

Lynx interims rise to £3.7m

Lynx Holdings increased taxable profits from £2.07m to £3.71m in the half-year to 31 March. The interim dividend rises from 0.45p to 0.5p. Roger Pinnington, chairman, said: "The investments we have made in existing products and services and in selected acquisitions provides Lynx with significant growth opportunities." The full benefits of the merger to form Sphinx CST would not be seen until the next financial year. The mortgage and personal lending systems company had a quiet start to the year due to a shortfall in new licence sales, but prospects have increased.

Lonrho sugar sale triggers fall in rand

Lonrho sold its South African subsidiary, Lonrho Sugar Corporation, yesterday to the country's biggest producer, Illovo Sugar, for £223.4m. The £.6m rand cash payment was so big that it drove the rand down to its lowest levels in two months.

The sale is a key step for Lonrho in its drive to sell off unwanted businesses and emerge into two companies, one focused on mining and the other on African trading businesses that include car distribution and property management.

A Lonrho spokesman said yesterday that the deal would cut the company's debt burden by 40 per cent and give Nicholas Morrell, chief executive, valuable breathing space in his demerger programme, which he aims to have under way by the year end.

The spokesman said the deal would also buy time for the company in its attempts to sell its Princess hotels division at as good a price as possible. Lonrho's shares rose 2p to 137.5p following yesterday's announcement.

Mr Morrell himself said: "The disposal of our shareholding in Lonrho Sugar Corporation represents a



Nicholas Morrell: Wants to get the demerger under way

further important step in realising the inherent value of Lonrho's businesses and reducing group debt while further enhancing the competitive position of LSC through its merger with Illovo."

Illovo said the acquisition of Lonrho's 94.25 per cent stake in Lonrho Sugar, which owns plantations in Swaziland, South Africa, Mauritius and Malawi, would give it access to lower-cost production in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Lonrho Sugar is a globally

competitive, low-cost producer with a wide geographic spread of assets," said Don MacLeod, Illovo's managing director.

The company's attractions include cheap labour costs, high yields from its soil quality and irrigation network and a geographic range that spreads weather risks over a large area.

The deal, which ends months of speculation about the future of Lonrho's sugar business, will create Africa's biggest sugar group with interests ranging across southern and east Africa.

Lonrho Sugar is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the Swaziland Stock Market. In the year to 31 March 1996, Lonrho Sugar made pre-tax profits of £27.8m on turnover of £99.6m. It had shareholder's funds of £66.2m at the year end.

Minority shareholders will be offered 13.90 rand in cash per share and will also be entitled to the final dividend.

Lonrho Sugar shares, which are rarely infrequently dealt, last traded at 16.20 rand on Monday. The stock has risen from 12.60 rand since Lonrho Sugar flagged that it was in takeover talks in February.

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IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
CHANCERY DIVISION
COMPANIES COURT
IN THE MATTER OF INCEPTA GROUP PLC
and
IN THE MATTER OF THE COMPANIES ACT 1985

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that a Petition was on 21st April 1997 presented to Her Majesty's High Court of Justice for the confirmation of the reduction of the share premium account of the above named Company from £2,664,011 to £2,162,824.

AND NOTICE IS FURTHER GIVEN that the said Petition is directed to be heard by Mr Registrar Buckley, at the Royal Courts of Justice, Strand, London, WCA 3LL, on Wednesday 21st May 1997.

ANY creditor or shareholder of the said Company desiring to oppose the making of an Order for the confirmation of the said reduction of share premium account should appear at the time of hearing in person or by Counsel for that purpose.

A copy of the said Petition will be furnished to any such person requiring the same by the undersigned solicitors on payment of the regulated charge for the same.

Dated 6th May 1997

Westlake Bell, 16 Bedford Street,
Covent Garden, London WC2E 9HF
Tel: 0171-933 3000
Fax: 0171-436 1361
Ref: LSH/97/49/15406
Solicitors for the Company

Bed maker profits rise and shine

Silentnight Holdings, the bed manufacturer, saw profits rise by 29 per cent to £14.3m last year boosted by strong sales in its core UK market and its growing business in the United States. The shares rose 10 per cent to 328p on the news.

Bill Simpson, chief executive, said: "It is the group's continued aim to maintain its strong position in the UK bed market, to grow its share of the UK cabinet market and to grow its bed business in North America both organically and by acquisition when suitable opportunities present themselves."

He added that he expected a more normal rate of sales growth in the bed market this year whilst the company had planned for further growth in the cabinet business.

Group sales rose from £189m to £212m in the year to 1 February. The dividend was increased by 25 per cent to 10p a share.

Bre-X president alleges fraud

In a new twist to the Bre-X Minerals gold mining scandal, the company's president, David Walsh, yesterday filed a fraud complaint with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), a spokeswoman for the police said. The move follows the delisting from the Toronto exchange of the shares, which lost nearly all their value after trading was restarted earlier this week.

Following a report by auditor Stratthcona Mineral Services branding Bre-X's claim to the world's biggest gold mine a scam, Mr Walsh handed a letter alleging a fraud to members of the RCMP's commercial crime unit. No suspects were identified in the letter. Bre-X company officials could not immediately be reached for comment.

The filing of the complaint is the latest development in what has been described as "the world's biggest mining scam", involving the fabrication of test data at a secret Borneo laboratory, the unexplained death of a Bre-X geologist after a fall from a helicopter and evidence that senior directors made fortunes from share sales last year at the height of the shares' popularity. Bre-X shares lost 80 per cent of their value in a 30-minute period in March after one of the company's partners, Freepoint McMoran, said its own tests had found "insignificant" quantities of gold at the Bussang mine in the jungles of Indonesian Borneo.

Records of the Ontario Securities Commission showed that Mr Walsh sold 300,000 shares at an average price of around C\$25 between April and September 1996, netting about C\$7.5m (£3.3m). In all, directors and their families cashed in shares worth more than C\$100m.

Company Results

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Avon Rubber (I)	166m (172m)	15.6m (10.2m)	42.5p (24p)	6.15p (5.75p)
Buysy Ship Ltd (F)	271m (257m)	31.7m (26.7m)	6.2p (5.4p)	4.7p (3.4p)
Highway House (F)	14.0m (12.0m)	-1.85m (-3.02m)	-1.7p (-7.7p)	nil (nil)
Jardine Group (I)	15.0m (7.0m)	0.20m (-0.62m)	1.3p (-5.7p)	nil (-)
Lynx Holdings (I)	53.9m (38.1m)	3.71m (2.07m)	2.56p (1.73p)	0.5p (0.45p)
MINT Computing (I)	10.7m (8.2m)	2.42m (2.37m)	13.3p (13p)	3.6p (2.7p)
Recognition Systems (I)	0.33m (0.25m)	-1.13m (-0.29m)	-4.2p (-1.4p)	nil (-)
Rumtek (F)	4.7m (3.7m)	0.23m (0.22m)	4.3p (3.6p)	1.9p (-)
Silentnight Holdings (F)	212m (190m)	14.3m (11.7m)	21.66p (17.84p)	10.8p (8p)
Thorn Holdings (I)	5.7m (5.9m)	0.77m (0.82m)	4.7p (5p)	1.7p (1.6p)
Western Computer (F)	14.0m (11.8m)	1.30m (1.26m)	11.25p (10.94p)	5p (5p)

(F) - Final (I) - Interim (N) - Nine months

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FTSE 100	4580.4 +42.9
FTSE 250	4510.4 -8.9
FTSE 350	2226.2 +15.9
SEAQ VOLUME	958m shares
48,701 bargains	
Gilt Index	96.59 -0.05
Share spotlight	
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business

Minister plugs in to power row

In the first of a series of articles on Labour, business and the City, Chris Godsmark asks what the new Government means for utility regulation

John Battle, the new Energy and Science Minister, yesterday held his first talks with the two energy regulators with the delicate question of whether to delay the start of domestic power and gas competition understood to be high on the agenda.

No details were given of the meetings with Clare Spottiswoode, gas industry regulator or her electricity counterpart, Professor Stephen Littlechild. Yet the relationship between government and the regulators, something the Conservatives deliberately kept unclear, is threatening to become one of Mr Battle's biggest headaches.

The DTI may not be the highest-profile department during Labour's storm in office, but the seemingly arcane technicalities of electricity competition represent not only one of the most pressing issues on its agenda but threaten to undermine the drive to put consumer interests above those of shareholders - something Mr Battle described as a "priority" just hours after being given the job.

Dieter Helm, energy expert and head of the Ofgem consultancy group explained: "I think John has to act very quickly. The easy option is to muddle through, but by then it could be too late to avoid chaos. Everyone knows domestic power competition will be delayed. It's a question of whether he can take difficult decisions."

Several regional electricity companies (RECs) have so far requested talks with Mr Battle with the thinly disguised aim of postponing competition, which on Professor Littlechild's timetable would roll-out between April and September next year. Privately, several RECs believe the process is hopelessly tight, although publicly no company has said it would fail to meet the deadline.

The difficulty has been the lack of co-ordination between the 14 power companies involved; 12 RECs and the two Scottish suppliers. They must all produce complex new computer systems which can talk to each other and track customers as they switch supplier. If these fail experts predict huge billing problems as households disappear from the systems. Estimates of the cost of introducing competition range from £50m to £1bn.

On the other side the Electricity Consumers' Committee, independent bodies which represent customers' interests, are stepping up their demands to keep to the existing deadline. Yvonne Constance, chairman of the committee, yesterday wrote to Mr Battle urging that customers should get the benefits of competition on time. She said: "We are aware the RECs were lobbying before and after the election. However, there is useful progress on the computer systems and there is nothing to be gained by removing the pressure to deliver. Any delay accepted now will let the momentum go out of the system."

The answer, according to Mr Helm, is for Mr Battle to announce a fundamental review of competition, which would take several weeks. "A lot of costs are being committed here for a timetable which may never happen. The policy needs to be bold and well thought out. It's not a big task to have a complete review, it's just unpalatable."

Yet delaying competition would almost certainly bring Mr Battle into conflict with Professor Littlechild, who has repeatedly defended his role in the project. A similar move to put back the further opening up of the gas market, planned to hit Scotland and the North-east of England this October, would sour relations with Ms Spottis-



Fresh brief: John Battle, the minister, has already met gas and electricity regulators

woode, who before the election made clear her doubts about the windfall utility tax.

Labour has suggested it may merge the gas and electricity watchdogs into one department, though Mr Helm said the outcome may be less radical. "I don't think he will replace the current regulators when their contracts expire."

One thing Mr Battle has no shortage of is advice. One of his first moves was to approach Dan Cory to become a full-time paid adviser. Mr Cory, from the left-leaning think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is a

well-known critic of the present system of utility regulation and of price regimes which serve up windfall gains for investors.

Mr Cory's role could, according to some observers, point to a much bigger transformation of utility regulation than anything Labour suggested in opposition. "The manifesto was fairly weakened and didn't say too much. We've got to look at changes to make regulation more accountable so its quite open at the moment," he said.

Labour's determination to push ahead with these more general utility reforms is un-

clear. Dieter Helm argues Mr Battle may prefer to concentrate on tightening the firms' social obligations. "He may look at a social levy to meet these obligations such as cutting disconnections or preventing price differentials between regions."

If Mr Battle successfully grasps the nettle on competition and maintains reasonable relations with the regulators, he could win valuable space for a fundamental review. Yet the risks are huge. If he fails, his credibility and that of Labour's bequeathed DTI could be severely weakened.

Is Beckett trapped by a presidential precedent?

Roll this one round your mouth: "President Margaret." No no, calm down, I'm not talking about Thatcher. I'm referring to whether Margaret Beckett will be tempted to hang on to at least one of the "trappings of power" from the previous administration; that is, the title: "President of the Board of Trade."

This was, of course, Michael Heseltine's creation. Apparently, when asked this week by an underling for her thoughts on the matter, Ms Beckett merely reacted with a "quizzical look".

We wait with bated breath to see whether or not this particular trapping proves too enticing to discard.

Yet another example of New Labour getting off to a running start - Ken Clarke's pet project, the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) is to get a thorough overhaul.

The original idea of bringing in private money to public projects has sunk in a swamp of accounting technicalities and confusion. The man to oversee Labour's review of PFI is Geoffrey Robinson MP, ex-managing director of Jaguar and the Treasury's new Paymaster General.

The review will be carried out by Malcolm Bates, who spent 12 years at GEC as deputy managing director, and is the new chairman of Premier Farnell, the electronic components maker.

Here comes the New Labour bit: anyone wanting to make their views known to Mr Bates has only until the 13 June. So get cracking.

And Mr Bates instructs people to keep their contributions short & sharp: "Keep them to two sides of A4 if possible please."

At this rate, they might actually get the PFI to work.

Before you get too sorry for the Tories, I am delighted to reveal that Norma Major's FR has a new job: spokeswoman for *Cosmopolitan*.

PEOPLE & BUSINESS



How far will Margaret Beckett follow Heseltine?

Eileen Wise, Head of News at Conservative Central Office, has been appointed Director of Corporate Communications at The National Magazine Company.

I wonder whether this will set a precedent. Portfolio for *Landed* magazine, perhaps?

Picture the scene: John Bruton, the Irish Prime Minister, is having breakfast yesterday at the Grosvenor Hotel in London as a guest of the Irish Trade Board. On the same table are Peter Sutherland, newly elevated interim chairman of BP, Niall Fitzgerald, chief executive of Unilever, Christopher Haskins of Northern Foods - and Bob Geldof, creator of Live Aid and former Boomtown Rats.

Mr Bruton delivered a short speech about Irish-British trade, the success of the Irish economy and the prospects for peace in Northern Ireland. Sadly, my informants were unable to overhear what was said.

Apparently Sir Bob was looking well, considering his

reputation as a late-night club-goer. He was there in his position as head of Planet 24, his media group. Mr Sutherland, nicknamed "Suds", was there in his capacity as chairman of Goldman Sachs International.

If for any reason Mr Sutherland doesn't have his interim status at BP ratified as a permanent chairman, how about Sir Bob? Altogether now, "Tell me: Why I don't like Mondays..."

One doesn't normally think of the Global Markets Economics team at Bankers' Trust as cutting social satirists, but so it appears.

The team's newsletter boasts a "World Exclusive" on the identities of the four outsiders who are due to be appointed to the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), set up by Gordon Brown to fix interest rates.

According to Peter Price, managing director, the mystery four are: Professor Sydney Trimmer, Polenta, Professor of Stakeholding, University of Islington, best known for a *neo-Aristotelian* approach to optimum resource allocation in a municipal library environment; Dr Victoria Harpy, Chair of the Social Market Association Research Council, formerly leader of Brent Council's "Smash the fascist bosses anti-plutocrat support group"; Alfred "Alf" Stubbs, General Secretary, Amalgamated Union of Metalworkers, Technical, Educational, Synoptical, Sanitological, Sanitation Workers and Allied Trades; and Baroness Edwina de Odbbins, who will "operate the Ouija Board".

Now why does something tell me Bankers' Trust isn't taking this committee seriously?

John Willcock

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	D-Mark	Spot	1 month	3 months
US	1.5207	9.7	28.22	1000	-	-	0.8587
Canada	2.2475	65.50	161.73	13831	30.29	86.94	0.8100
Germany	2.7674	78.73	241.21	17075	38.36	116.12	1.0000
France	63.2924	254.75	736.76	6123	10.74	303.08	0.3394
Italy	2.7381	9.25	20.42	16953	153.22	410.50	0.89458
Japan	200.03	106.104	310.304	12330	56.55	167.165	72.5007
Spain	1.4301	3.62	8.09	13265	42.40	120.24	0.3594
Belgium	5.7200	19.13	40.34	35.44	63.65	245.215	0.2043
Denmark	115.54	280.230	830.730	6.4955	126.37	390.340	3.8064
Netherlands	3.1191	10.62	21.28	19255	42.40	120.24	0.3594
Ireland	10.727	3.2	6.8	15103	6.5	15.10	0.3676
Norway	1.481	330.280	950.450	70.939	163.16	453.402	0.4467
Sweden	2.23	2.1	4.1	10.17	10.17	10.17	0.4467
Switzerland	12.45	240.500	750.440	77.098	106.91	325.275	0.4953
Australia	2.3378	97.50	291.278	14.255	50.47	149.143	0.8448
Hong Kong	2.0769	6.5	13.6	10.17	10.17	10.17	0.3706
Malaysia	4.0538	0.0	0.0	2.5075	21.24	62.68	1.4856
New Zealand	2.3631	0.0	0.0	1.8	1.8	1.8	0.8587
Saudi Arabia	6.0763	0.0	0.0	3.7505	1.4	5.10	2.9565
Singapore	2.3407	0.0	0.0	14.443	18.75	60.35	0.8459

Other Spot Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	Country	Sterling	Dollar
Argentina	16203	0.0899	Nigeria	138328	85.7000
Australia	164775	12.083	Oman	0.6241	0.3850
Brazil	12766	0.0254	Philippines	65.136	40.287
Canada	14444	0.0254	Poland	42.772	0.2772
China	3.501	3.4009	Portugal	218.387	17.775
Egypt	3.898	0.0	Romania	933.05	575.000
Ghana	3.9938	10.7500	Russia	27.479	4.470
India	4.40538	27.7780	South Africa	44.5277	27.700
Indonesia	3.6301	0.0	UAE	5.5945	3.571
Kuwait	0.4822	0.0306			

Forward rates quoted high to low are at a discount; subtract from spot rate. Rate quoted low to high are at a premium; add to spot rate. *Dollar rates quoted as reciprocals. For the latest foreign exchange rates call 0891 123 3033. Calls cost 50p per minute.

Interest Rates

UK	Germany	US	Japan
Base	6.25%	Prime	8.75%
France	Discount	Discount	5.00%
Intervention	3.5%	Fed Funds	5.25%
Prime	4.50%	Discount	2.50%
Discount	7.5%	10-Day Repo	5.50%
Netherlands	Discount	Sweden	Switzerland
Advances	2.70%	Repo (Ave)	4.00%
			Discount
			100%
			Lombard
			4.25%

Bond Yields

Country	5yr	10yr	15yr	20yr	30yr
UK	7.0%	6.8%	7.25%	7.0%	6.5%
France	6.5%	6.2%	6.5%	6.5%	6.5%
Germany	5.5%	5.2%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%
Italy	10.0%	7.4%	5.75%	7.74	6.5%
Spain	8.0%	4.8%	6.0%	5.77	5.0%
Netherlands	4.75%	4.74	5.5%	5.0%	5.0%

Money Market Rates

Overnight	7 Day	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
Interbank	6.7%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Bankers' CDs	6.7%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Local Authority Depos	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Discount Market Depos	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Treasury Bills (91 Day)	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Dollar Cdn	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%	5.5%
ECU Linked Dep	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%	4.4%

Tourist Rates

2 Buys	3 Buys	5 Buys	10 Buys	20 Buys	30 Buys
Australia (Dollars)	2.2620	France (Francs)	5.1180	New Zealand (Dollars)	2.3000
Austria (Schillings)	13.0000	Germany (Marks)	2.7070	Norway (Krone)	11.2500
Belgium (Francs)	55.9000	Greece (Drachmas)	433.0000	Portugal (Escudos)	272.0000
Canada (Dollars)	2.1650	Hong Kong (Dollars)	12.2500	Spain (Pesetas)	227.2000
Cyprus (Pounds)	0.8050	India (Rupees)	1.0425	Sweden (Kronor)	12.2500
Denmark (Krone)	10.3000	Italy (Lira)	270.4000	Switzerland (Francs)	2.2390
Finland (Markka)	2.2400	Japan (Yen)	199.0000	Turkey (Lira)	217.070.000
		Malta (Lira)	0.6005	United States (Dollars)	1.5875

Liffe Financial Futures

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Open
Long Oil	119.29	114.20	119.29
Short Oil	119.29	114.20	119.29
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25

Liffe FTSE 100 Index Option

Series	4500	4550	4600	4650	4700
May	626	4419	1845	586	...
Jun	12744	9482	9894	42113	...
Jul	16182	13082	100103	78130	...
Aug	17350	14778	117120	59147	110181

Energy

Contract	Settlement	High/Low	Open
Long Oil	119.29	114.20	119.29
Short Oil	119.29	114.20	119.29
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25
3 Mth Eurodollar	92.25	92.25	92.25

Commodity Indices

Index	1970=100	1980=100	1990=100
Industrial	100.0	100.0	100.0
Energy	100.0	100.0	100.0
Metals	100.0	100.0	100.0
Grains	100.0	100.0	100.0
Softs	100.0	100.0	100.0
Stocks	100.0	100.0	100.0
Bonds	100.0	100.0	100.0
Real Estate	100.0	100.0	100.0
Art	100.0	100.0	100.0
Collectibles	100.0	100.0	100.0
Commodities	100.0	100.0	100.0

Industrial Metals

Aluminum	1647.45	1659.69	11316	75925	2825
Aluminum Alloy	1480.50	1505.10	1108	8240	2825
Copper	2458.40	2508.37	1125	14920	100
Lead	820.51	832.3	5640	113520	18
Nickel	7890.700	7796.76	28274	30318	18
Platinum	5855.585	5850.590	4266	585	18
Zinc	1002.3	1023.24	17734	432150	225

Precious Metals

Platinum	376.50	376.50	376.50	376.50	376.50
Palladium	157.00	157.00	157.00	157.00	157.00
Silver spot	475.25	475.25	475.25	475.25	475.25
Gold Bullion	343.75	343.75	343.75	343.75	343.75

Agricultural

Cocoa	1100	1100	1100	1100	1100
May	98	98	98	98	98
Jun	100	100	100	100	100
Jul	102	102	102	102	102
Aug	104	104	104	104	104
Sep	106	106	106	106	106
Oct	108	108	108	108	108
Nov	110	110	110	110	110
Dec	112	112	112	112	112
Jan	114	114	114	114	114
Feb	116	116	116	116	116
Mar	118	118	118	118	118
Apr	120	120	120	120	120
May	122	122	122	122	122
Jun	124	124	124	124	124
Jul	126	126	126	126	126
Aug	128	128	128	128	128
Sep	130	130	130	130	130

Royal end to a Flight of fancy

Racing

RICHARD EDMONDSON reports from Chester

Just as the fairy story was about to be completed in the Ormond Stakes yesterday, Royal Court ruined it by beating the old soldier Further Flight. It was rather like Prince Charming marrying one of the ugly sisters. Further Flight's grey dappled figure is the sort you see in bedtime books and he seems to have been around since we were much younger. The 11-year-old arrived for competition yesterday with 56 starts to his name, 22 of them victories, and the prospect of carrying his regular jockey, Michael Hills, to his 1,000th career success in Britain. The romantic scene was set.

If Further Flight was the good guy, the bad lad of the race was his stablemate Moonax, the 1994 St Leger winner, whose preferred diet is human flesh. There is a giveaway clue that the chestnut is not the most pleasant of customers when he is escorted into the parade ring by his lass, Joyce Wallgrave, who is wearing a body protector and heavily padded arm guards. She looked like Wayne Gretzky.

Moonax himself did not appear particularly cuddly. He slavered rabidly, sending saliva back over his mane, and refused to leave the paddock. Once he emerged on to a course fringed by a harlequin canopy of umbrellas the six-year-old displayed his dressage skills by going into reverse.

Darryll Holland eventually got him down to the start, where stallholders appeared to be drawing straws. Moonax was blindfolded and led into his stall, where he promptly squatted. This proved a cathartic act, however, and as soon as the gates opened Moonax behaved like a cherub.

Election Day tugged the field along for much of the journey but there were figures moving more smoothly in behind. Moonax looked dangerous off the final bend, but then Further Flight, whose low head carriage suggests he might kick himself in the teeth, and Royal Court settled down to fight out the finish. Only close home did the veteran succumb.

The winner's trainer, Peter Chappie-Hyam, was formerly assistant to Further Flight's handler, Barry Hills, and he would have understood if hissing had greeted his entrance on to the stage of the winners' en-

closure. "Further Flight is a grand old horse and I'm sorry to have beaten him even though I've not managed that before," he said. "I was assistant when he was two and three and he won the Ebor so I know what a grand old horse he is."

John Reid, the muddled winning jockey, bore the look you might see in a colliery cage. He patted out his race report. "I was more or less pushing him for the whole of the race just to keep him in it, but you always know that when you put your foot down on the pedal he is going to pick up a bit," Reid said. "It wasn't easy. It was hard work for him and me."

While Reid feasted on earth the victorious owner was probably finishing off his digestif. Royal Court's victory completed a clean sweep of the meet-

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Cyrilan
(Nottingham 720)
NS: Rymer's Rascal
(Carlisle 340)

ing's major races for Robert Sangster, who had also won the Chester Vase (Panama City) and the Chester Cup (Top Cees). Sangster rarely seems to make bad moves and his decision to forsake the atrocious weather of the Rooftop for London business meetings and a spot of lunch at Daphne's hardly looked calamitous either.

The mere mention of Further Flight is enough to reduce Barry Hills to tears and there was moisture in his eyes and a croak in his voice as he detailed his disappointment. "It would have been a fairytale if he had won because it would have been Michael's 1,000th winner and we all know how much that horse has helped his career," Hills said. "If he hadn't have been going as well as that he would probably have won. He has been a very good horse and still is."

Hills could also make excuses for Jack The Ripper and be protective about the crazed Moonax. If you suggest the horse might be calmed by testis-severance Barry agrees the operation should go ahead but that the questioner should be the patient. "We'll think about putting a half pair of blinkers on to make him concentrate in future," he said. "He did take the piss out of everybody today but once he set off he ran a very genuine race. He's run his heart out today. It was not an afternoon, however, when the collective heart got what it desired."

Reams Of Verse for York

Henry Cecil, who has trained six winners of the Musidora Stakes, will be represented by Reams Of Verse in Tuesday's renewal. Likely to start favourite, Reams Of Verse goes to York on the back of a good sixth behind her stablemate, Sleepytyme in the 1,000 Guineas. That saw her promoted to the head of Oaks

betting at around 7-1. The John Gosden-trained Noisette, who confirmed encouraging gallop reports with a smooth win at Ascot last month, could be her main rival. Ben Hanbury will saddle Messed, who wintered in Dubai and who found infancy as the horse whose kick ended Willie Carson's career.

LINGFIELD

3.50 Shanghai LI
2.20 Rins In The Family
2.50 Prince Foley
3.20 Chevit

GOING: Good (Turf Standard 14W).
STALLS: Stable side (Turf) 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th, 101st, 102nd, 103rd, 104th, 105th, 106th, 107th, 108th, 109th, 110th, 111th, 112th, 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, 118th, 119th, 120th, 121st, 122nd, 123rd, 124th, 125th, 126th, 127th, 128th, 129th, 130th, 131st, 132nd, 133rd, 134th, 135th, 136th, 137th, 138th, 139th, 140th, 141st, 142nd, 143rd, 144th, 145th, 146th, 147th, 148th, 149th, 150th, 151st, 152nd, 153rd, 154th, 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sport

Herbert puts title challengers in the shade

Motor racing

DERICK ALLSOP
reports from Monte Carlo

True to character, Johnny Herbert retained a sense of humour and realism as his team told him he was fastest in practice for Sunday's Monaco Grand Prix. "Sorry it's the wrong day," he said ruefully.

Unofficial practice day – always Thursday rather than Friday here in the Principality – has the capacity to produce meaningless scenarios and the con-

test proper begins with tomorrow's qualifying session.

However, Herbert's elevation to the top of the Formula One practice charts for the first time after a century of races is a significant gauge of the progress he and the Sauber-Petronas have made in tandem.

Certainly there was nothing half-baked in the endeavours of Michael Schumacher and Jacques Villeneuve, the two drivers closest to the Englishman. And try suggesting to Heinz-Harald Frentzen, winner of the San Marino Grand Prix

a fortnight ago, that his commitment was diminished. He crashed his Williams-Renault into a barrier in vain pursuit of Herbert's time.

Herbert's current driving is like his natural demeanour: a joy to encounter. He professes himself at home with Sauber, comfortable and appreciated. And, he says, the traumas of his life and career have insulated him against the pressures of F1.

Herbert explained: "I had to get over my accident in 1988 and then difficult times at Lotus and Benetton. There's a lot more

mental warfare in F1 these days and I've survived it because I'm tougher now. Going through all I went through has helped me cope with today's F1, where you often find drivers head-to-head and criticising each other. We had it with Michael Schumacher and Damon Hill.

"I've not got myself involved in that sort of thing and I'm happier now than I have been for three or four years. I'm with a team where everyone is working to the same end."

Herbert, a resident of Monaco, is usually to be seen on these

streets travelling within the legal speed limit of 25mph at the wheel of his jeep or astride his Harley-Davidson. Local knowledge may well have helped yesterday, but at 180mph the familiar landmarks mean little.

He said: "Silverstone is still my real home track, but it is nice and special when you do well here. Everyone wants to win at Monaco. It's a great challenge, perhaps the greatest challenge of all."

Damon Hill's objective this weekend is to finish a race for the first time in the Arrows-Yamaha. So far the champion's

moment I'm concentrating my efforts on Arrows."

MONACO GRAND PRIX Free practice (0.55.000) 1. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 1:59.100; 2. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 1:59.200; 3. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 1:59.300; 4. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 1:59.400; 5. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 1:59.500; 6. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:00.000; 7. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:00.100; 8. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:00.200; 9. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:00.300; 10. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:00.400; 11. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:00.500; 12. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:01.000; 13. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:01.100; 14. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:01.200; 15. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:01.300; 16. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:01.400; 17. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:01.500; 18. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:02.000; 19. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:02.100; 20. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:02.200; 21. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:02.300; 22. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:02.400; 23. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:02.500; 24. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:03.000; 25. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:03.100; 26. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:03.200; 27. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:03.300; 28. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:03.400; 29. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:03.500; 30. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:04.000; 31. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:04.100; 32. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:04.200; 33. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:04.300; 34. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:04.400; 35. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:04.500; 36. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:05.000; 37. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:05.100; 38. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:05.200; 39. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:05.300; 40. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:05.400; 41. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:05.500; 42. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:06.000; 43. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:06.100; 44. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:06.200; 45. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:06.300; 46. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:06.400; 47. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:06.500; 48. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:07.000; 49. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:07.100; 50. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:07.200; 51. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:07.300; 52. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:07.400; 53. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:07.500; 54. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:08.000; 55. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:08.100; 56. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:08.200; 57. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:08.300; 58. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:08.400; 59. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:08.500; 60. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:09.000; 61. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:09.100; 62. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:09.200; 63. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:09.300; 64. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:09.400; 65. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:09.500; 66. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:10.000; 67. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:10.100; 68. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:10.200; 69. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:10.300; 70. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:10.400; 71. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:10.500; 72. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:11.000; 73. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:11.100; 74. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:11.200; 75. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:11.300; 76. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:11.400; 77. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:11.500; 78. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:12.000; 79. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:12.100; 80. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:12.200; 81. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:12.300; 82. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:12.400; 83. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:12.500; 84. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:13.000; 85. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:13.100; 86. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:13.200; 87. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:13.300; 88. A. Frentzen (Ger) Williams 2:13.400; 89. J. Herbert (GB) Sauber-Petronas 2:13.500; 90. M. Schumacher (Ger) Williams 2:14.000; 91. J. Villeneuve (Can) Williams 2:14.100; 92. A. 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O'Connor puts pain behind him

Golf
ANDY FARRELL
reports from Thame

After 27 years on the tour, Christy O'Connor Jr thought a year away would do him some good. Fat chance. "The whole family are steeped in golf," he said. "I was the only one in the house not playing. I watched the boys on television and I missed the crack."

O'Connor proved his successful return from a nasty bout of tennis elbow in his left arm with a 68 in the first round of the Benson & Hedges International. He was one behind the New Zealander Greg Turner, while Colin Montgomerie, Ian Woosnam and Bernhard Langer, in their own ways, all had 70s.

A Ryder Cup hero at The Belfry in 1989, O'Connor made a dramatic comeback, after being involved in a helicopter crash, by winning the British Masters in 1992. Since then he has suffered from Morison's Metastasis, a painful foot condition, and in November 1995 was afflicted by tennis elbow.

A cheque for £3,800 for 54th place in the Volvo PGA was the sum total of the 11 tournaments he played last year. After six months and £12,000 worth of unsuccessful treatment, O'Connor, the Irish Olympic doctor, put O'Connor under the laser. "It was very severe but it put me back on the road to playing golf," O'Connor said.

"It was like placing your hand on a red hot grill. You could smell the skin burning. It

was black for two days. But having a full-body MRI scan was even worse. It was an awful sensation. I wanted to die. I pressed the red emergency button to get out."

O'Connor, who will join his famous uncle Christy Sr on the Seniors tour next year, could not hold a cup of coffee in his left hand but has gradually built up his strength in that arm and returned to the tour in Dubai in February. Yesterday he collected four birdies, did not drop a shot and missed twice from inside four feet. "I am playing nicely and enjoying it," he said. "I know exactly how [Jose Maria] Olazabal must have felt, especially him being so young. I really missed it."

The Irishman made his score in the morning and despite the temperature rising - well, relatively - and the rain holding off in the afternoon, no one challenged O'Connor's 67. The Kiwi arrived on Tuesday to find a light smattering of snow covering the course and decided against a practice round. He was not in the pro-am on Wednesday, either, but warmed by a pair of long Johns, bought by his wife Jane, his only dropped shot came at the ninth, his last hole, where he was short of the green with two drivers.

While Woosnam's round contained two birdies and 16 pars, Montgomerie was far from his consistent self. Having had three birdies and one bogey on the back nine, which he played first, he then played the front half: bogey, bogey, bogey, double bogey, birdie, double bogey, birdie. "We're

playing a big golf course and eight birdies suggests something is going right," Montgomerie said. "But all those bogeys suggests there's far too much going wrong."

The main problem was coming up short with his short-iron. At the eighth, where he took six, Monty had 130 yards to the flag and hit it only 80 into a lake. There are plenty of man-made water hazards on the course but there is no need to dye them blue since they turn that colour with the cold. Montgomerie's face turned a deeper shade of red. "Something is not right and I'll phone my coach when I get home tonight," the Scot said. "It's probably an easy fault to cure. It's just finding the cure."

Woosnam did not drop a shot but was never going to pick up too many, either. "I played steady, but I didn't hole anything," said the Welshman, who only missed three greens. His long approach put at the last linked on the edge of the hole and then decided to stay above ground a little longer.

BENSON & HEDGES INTERNATIONAL OPEN (The Belfry, Thame) (GB or NI unless stated): 67 Greg Turner (NZ), 68 O'Connor Jr, 69 Ian James, D Clarke, A Gilchrist, I Henderson, R Jones (GB), P McLeod, J Sargent (Ireland), B May (USA), 70 C Sorenson (Den), C Montgomerie, P Lunn, B Langer (GB), P Scharf, D Howell, K Wainwright (Ireland), D Borge (Spain), 71 W. Woosnam, G Orr, R McFarlane, S Lunn (Ireland), N Fash (Ireland), 72 P. Quast (Ireland), 73 J. O'Connor (Ireland), 74 G. Gilford, D. Cooney, P. Heald (Ireland), P. Eales, T. Borm (Ireland), R. Johnson (Ireland), J. Egan (Ireland), J. Robertson, P. Price, R. Ruffery, M. Martin (Ireland), P. McGilley, M. A. Jenner (Ireland), D. Robertson, S. Wainwright, J. Payne, I. Pym, E. Rice (Ireland), F. O'Sullivan (Ireland), S. Ballesteros (Ireland), P. Baker, K. Ersson (Ireland), S. Alan (Ireland), J. Haggman (Ireland), 75 R. Martin (Ireland), S. Richardson, M. McKeilly (Ireland), A. Foran (Ireland), D. Cole (Ireland), P. Wilson, R. Wilson, J. Murray, E. Caranahan (Ireland), S. Straker (Ireland), M. Wainwright (Ireland), P. Harrington, M. James, E. Darcy, I. Mosey, E. Romero (Ireland), R. D. Auld, J. Chopra (Ireland), D. Lee, S. Ballesteros, 76 S. Torrance.



Seve Ballesteros hits out of a bunker yesterday at Thame Photograph: David Ashdown

Bassett to take over from Pearce

Football

Stuart Pearce, as expected, is to step down as Nottingham Forest's manager. He said yesterday he could not devote enough time to the rebuilding job needed after the club's relegation from the Premiership.

Pearce, who will carry on playing for the club, thinks Forest need to bring in new blood before next season's First Division campaign, but the England full-back is handing that responsibility to Dave Bassett, who moves across from his role as general manager following Forest's final Premiership game at Newcastle on Sunday.

"I feel as though some rebuilding needs doing at the club and, with the constraints on my time from international commitments, I am not going to have the time to go out and scout for players," Pearce said. "I'm not really prepared to sit back and take someone else's word for it on players."

Pearce, who became caretaker player-manager in December when Frank Clark left, said he had made his decision some time ago and that Forest's relegation had not had a bearing on it.

Michael Owen, the Liverpool striker, heads the 23-man Eng-

land youth party from which the coach, Ted Powell, will name his squad for next month's World Youth Championships in Malaysia. Injuries and the need for rest mean Leicester's Emile Heskey and Everton's Michael Branch will not take part in the championships, which start on 16 June. England are drawn against Mexico, the United Arab Emirates and the Ivory Coast.

Wolves could be without six players for tomorrow's First Division play-off semi-final first leg at Crystal Palace. There are doubts over two midfielders, Simon Osborn and Neil Embley; two strikers, Don Goodman and Iwan Roberts; and two defenders, Adrian Williams and Stephen Froggatt.

Bradford City's goalkeeper, Aidan Davison, has been recalled to the Northern Ireland squad for the friendly match against Thailand in Bangkok on 21 May. His only international appearance came in the 2-1 defeat by Sweden in a friendly match at Windsor Park last April.

Neither of coach Bryan Hamilton's first two choices, Alan Flett and Tommy Wright, is available for the match, so Wigan's Roy Carroll will be Davison's understudy.

Michael Owen, the Liverpool striker, heads the 23-man Eng-

A grand day out for the unsung heroes

Non-League notebook
RUPERT METCALF

Next week the likes of Juninho and Zola will be preparing to play in the FA Cup final but tomorrow it is the turn of Paul Pitman, Steve Brentano and 20 or so other players to enjoy a day out at Wembley.

Like last year, the FA Carlsberg Vase final brings together two clubs from northern England: Whitby Town and North Ferriby United. For Whitby it is the culmination of a triumphant season in which they have won the Federation Brewery Northern League and have secured promotion to the UniBond League. This makes up for the events of 1993, when they won the Northern League for the first time but were denied promotion by an unfortunate outbreak of inter-league politics.

Whitby's main man up front is Pitman, who scored a last-minute winner in the Vase semi-finals to see off Banstead Athletic. Pitman has been with the North Yorkshire club for 12 years and has scored well over

300 goals for them. Their manager is Harry Dunn, who helped to build the Scarborough side taken in to the Football League by Neil Warnock. He also played for Scarborough in two FA Trophy finals.

North Ferriby, from the Northern Counties East League, are captained by Brentano, who, along with his team-mate Bobby McNeill, won the Vase with Bridlington Town in 1992. Their squad also includes two other men to taste Vase glory: Andy Flounders with Brigg, who beat Clitheroe last season, and Mark Tenneson with Guiseley in 1991. The East Yorkshire club's player-manager is Tim Hottel, once an apprentice with Arsenal.

Contrasting fortunes face two Staffordshire clubs. Eastwood Hanley are to fold at the end of the season due to mounting debts while Stafford Rangers, who slid from the GM Vauxhall Conference to the Dr Martens League Midlands Division during the last two years, have been taken over by a local businessman, David Parker, who has halted the sale of their Marston Road ground.

Cotton's eruption clouds final

Rugby Union
CHRIS HEWITT

Two years ago, Will Carling described the membership of the Rugby Football Union as "57 old farts" and, in the process, succeeded in turning the Pilkington Cup final into a side issue. Tomorrow's Twickenham showpiece is in danger of suffering a similar fate, thanks to the latest eruption of malodorous hot air from the bowels of the RFU's divided hierarchy.

The newly-constituted RFU Reform Group, headed up by Fran Cotton, the Lions manager, has circulated every English club with allegations of RFU mismanagement, undemocratic manipulation and every other nefarious activity short of first-degree murder. The accusations, which carry the full support of Cliff Brittle, the union's disenchanted executive

chairman, centre on the £87.5m broadcasting deal with BSkyB, the signing of which is imminent.

Cotton and his colleagues have repeatedly claimed that Tony Hallett, the RFU secretary, misled member clubs over the terms contained in the interim Heads of Agreement - in particular, on the issues of pay-per-view and scheduling - and have called for his resignation. In turn, the RFU's disciplinary committee is investigating a leak of confidential documents that infuriated BSkyB executives and put the entire deal at risk.

Yesterday, BSkyB sources predicted Cotton and his colleagues would soon be wiping liberal amounts of egg from their faces. "We have a veto on pay-per-view and it is enshrined in black and white in the final BSkyB contract," said one. "There is no possibility of pay-per-view being introduced without our written consent. The

lawyers from both sides are close to finalising the agreement and the sooner we can go public with it, the better."

While the Reform Group continued to insist that the broadcasters would hold the whip hand over the scheduling of England international matches - in reality, BSkyB have dictated the timing of league matches since they started their live coverage of domestic club rugby three seasons ago - the RFU pointed to its own impeccable democratic credentials: four general meetings, a commission on the future of the game, an independent study and two reports into administrative structures, all instigated within the first 18 months of professionalism.

It now seems certain that more blood will be spilled at the annual meeting in July, at which the RFU intends to support a direct challenge to Brittle's

executive chairmanship. Twickenham is also pulling its wagons into a circle around Hallett, who remains the No 1 target for Cotton and his rebels.

John Fowler, the injured Sale lock, has withdrawn from England's two-test trip to Argentina after a straw-clutching visit to a faith healer failed to repair damaged knee ligaments. Northampton's Martin Bayfield dropped out on Wednesday because of groin trouble.

Graham Dawe, the Cornish farmer whose no-holds-barred hooking duel with Brian Moore dominated English front-row play for the best part of a decade, has retired from top-class rugby with Bath at the age of 37. Capped five times by his country, Dawe, who has struggled with thumb and elbow injuries throughout his testimonial season, said: "The old body is telling me something. It's time to say goodbye."

Wright gives Wigan an extra man

Rugby League
DAVE HADFIELD

Wigan make a team change for their match against the London Broncos tonight that virtually amounts to acquiring a new player.

Nigel Wright will start a league match for the first time since August 1995, after overcoming a horrific series of injuries. Wright has started only 19 matches in almost four years at Wigan, but the need for another creator to lift part of the burden from Andy Farrell means that their coach, Eric Hughes, wants him on the field from the kick-off tonight.

Wright will play stand-off outside Tony Smith, which also means that he will be in direct opposition to Shaun Edwards, on his first return visit to Central Park since his transfer to London.

Edwards continues to be kept out of his usual position by the form of the Broncos' scrum-half, Josh White, who was this week named as the winner of the Stones Gold Award as the Super League player of the month for April.

Wigan will have Lee Hansen making his full debut and Henry Paul back in action at full-back after the back injury that kept him out for most of last month, but his brother, Bradford's Robbie, will be missing for up to six weeks, starting with Sunday's vital Super League game with their Wembley conquerors, St Helens.

The Bulls' captain has not broken a bone in his foot, as was first feared, but ligament damage will keep him out for at least a month. The Bradford forward, Sonny Nickle, will be out for a similar length of time after fracturing his arm at Wembley.

Ipswich start at full strength

Hockey

Ipswich, the defending cup holders, will be at full strength for the semi-final visit of Clifton on Sunday, the former England international Vickey Dixon having completely recovered from a calf injury, writes Bill Cowell.

Clifton also expect to be at full strength following the decision of the Welsh defender Rachel O'Bryan to put club before a national training weekend. However, the Welsh management has decided to discipline O'Bryan, who is unlikely to join the national squad again before September.

While Hightown will start as favourites in the other semi-final against Doncaster, and will be looking for a good run-out when next weekend's European Cup Championship in mind, they will be conscious of the 8-2 League drubbing Doncaster inflicted earlier in the season. The final is at Milton Keynes on 25 May.

O'Brien will be looking for their third successive title in the Women's Under-19 Club Championship at Milton Keynes tomorrow. The strongest opposition in the five-team round-robin event is expected to come from Harlestone Magpies.

Athletics

The nine-member East Asian Games Association decided yesterday to allow Australia to enter the third East Asian Games in Osaka in 2001. The decision is only after O'Brien and O'Brien will be allowed to join the association," it said in a news release. The decision came ahead of tomorrow's opening of the second East Asian Games in the city of Fuzhou for a nine-day run. China, Taiwan, South Korea, Mongolia, Guam, Kazakhstan and Macau voted for Australia's participation in the Games, which will be held in Osaka, Japan, and Hong Kong, Australia.

Baseball

AMERICAN LEAGUE: Milwaukee 3, Oakland 0; Boston 11, Minnesota 3; Cleveland 7, Toronto 1; Detroit 12, Kansas City 3; Baltimore 3, Anaheim 2; New York Yankees 5, Pittsburgh 2; Philadelphia 7, Colorado 2; San Diego 6, Chicago Cubs 3.

Baseball

Chesler Jets have re-signed forward Ricardo Leonard for next season's Budweiser Basketball League. Keeping the player makes Chesler contenders for honours in England.

Jets expect to announce that their guard Hillary Scott will remain with the team, and the club are trying to re-sign the centre Billy Singleton, as well as rising England talent Matt Maslin.

Thames Valley have agreed terms with the centre Jason Siemon for the 1997-98 season. Siemon spent the first part of last year in Belgium before joining the Tigers late in the season.

NBA Second-round play-off results: Eastern Conference semi-finals: Miami 79, New York 59; New York beat best-of-seven series 2-0. Western Conference semi-finals: Houston 107, Seattle 108. (Series level at 2-1).

Cycling

TOUR OF ROMANDIE Second stage 123km, Le Locle to Estavayer-le-Lac, Switz. 1 M. Oppliger (4th), 2 J. Zeman (5th), 3 M. Tesson (6th), 4 B. Baudouin (7th), 5 S. Teuscher (8th), 6 J. Bader (9th), 7 J. S. Tesson (10th), 8 J. S. Tesson (11th), 9 J. S. Tesson (12th), 10 J. S. Tesson (13th), 11 J. S. Tesson (14th), 12 J. S. Tesson (15th), 13 J. S. Tesson (16th), 14 J. S. Tesson (17th), 15 J. S. Tesson (18th), 16 J. S. Tesson (19th), 17 J. S. Tesson (20th), 18 J. S. Tesson (21st), 19 J. S. Tesson (22nd), 20 J. S. Tesson (23rd), 21 J. S. Tesson (24th), 22 J. S. Tesson (25th), 23 J. S. Tesson (26th), 24 J. S. Tesson (27th), 25 J. S. Tesson (28th), 26 J. S. Tesson (29th), 27 J. S. Tesson (30th), 28 J. S. Tesson (31st), 29 J. S. Tesson (32nd), 30 J. S. Tesson (33rd), 31 J. S. Tesson (34th), 32 J. S. Tesson (35th), 33 J. S. Tesson (36th), 34 J. S. Tesson (37th), 35 J. S. Tesson (38th), 36 J. S. Tesson (39th), 37 J. S. Tesson (40th), 38 J. S. Tesson (41st), 39 J. S. Tesson (42nd), 40 J. S. 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Streets ahead

Johnny Herbert leads way in practice for the Monaco Grand Prix, page 28

sport

Irishman smiling

Andy Farrell on a golfing comeback, page 29

Rangers rush to be ready for Europe

Football

Rangers have 77 days to prepare for a midsummer Champions' League roulette which could leave them dumped out of Europe before they even begin the pursuit of "Ten-in-a-Row".

That was the stark reality for manager Walter Smith yesterday as he geared up for arguably the biggest overhaul in his 11-year stay at Ibrox. Smith reluctantly left behind the aftermath of equalling Celtic's nine consecutive Scottish titles to look ahead to the chilly prospect of European elimination.

He must appoint a successor to Richard Gough as captain, wrap up perhaps four signings to add to Jonas Thern and Tony Vidmar, and wrestle with scheduling which could leave top players with just a fortnight's break. And everything must be in

place by 23 and 30 July when Rangers will enter the European Cup pre-qualifying round with no margin for error. "If you go out at that stage you are out of Europe, period," said Smith. "It is only if you get through to the preliminary round, which includes the runners-up from Europe's top six nations, that you get a place in the Uefa Cup."

"The candidates for that stage at the moment are the likes of Barcelona, Parma, Bayer Leverkusen and Liverpool, Arsenal or whoever from England."

"We can't run away from the fact that our record in Europe should be better. We've qualified three times for the group stages which is okay but we haven't acquitted ourselves well enough there. It is a challenge we must take on and everybody wants us to raise our standards in Europe."

Smith disagrees with Uefa's

decision to allow the runners-up of the best leagues a place at Europe's top table and accepts that Rangers would have to win the European Cup to escape the qualification tightrope.

As the format stands, Rangers could be out of Europe before they kick off the defence of the Premier Division on 2 August. Smith has already begun trawling for new talent as he accepts that an end of an era is looming. He will try to maintain a strong Scottish accent in his team, but says it is becoming harder season by season.

As the manager spoke, the 35-year-old Gough was on a transatlantic flight to Kansas to start his new career, and a successor to the captain was very much on Smith's agenda.

"There are candidates here like Alan McClaren, Brian Laudrup and Andy Goram who have all captained the club in Richard's absence but I've yet to make up my mind," he said.

Smith has set his sights on as many as half a dozen new signings with Sweden's captain Jonas Thern due to come from Roma and the Australian defender Vidmar from NAC Breda. "I've made inquiries with a number of clubs about availability, prices, wages and so on. I'd hope to have some movement on that soon. We have three players who will be out of contract. Ian Ferguson has agreed a new three-year deal and we are still in negotiation with David Robertson and Gordon Durie. I'll talk again with them next week."

Smith admitted it was hard to talk about change at Ibrox with the players that have served him so well over several years still downing the championship champagne. "I have the highest regard for them and the way they have maintained their determination to carry on winning," Smith said. "It is not easy to talk about change when many have been terrific players for me in my first spell in football management."

Smith expects the injured pair Stuart McCall and Sebastian Rozental to be ready for the early start in Europe after being ruled out since October and January respectively. The goalkeeper Andy Goram should be fit for selection for Scotland's games against Wales and Malta before the World Cup qualifier in Belarus on 8 June.

Rangers will be back for pre-season training on 23 June although Vidmar and Craig Moore have international commitments with Australia, Gordon Petric will be with Yugoslavia and others will have virtually only two weeks off. The Scottish champions will go to Germany for pre-season games and face Everton in the Dave Watson testimonial at Goodison on 16 July.

More football, page 29

Gascoigne in fitness race

CATHERINE RILEY

Paul Gascoigne will embark on a tour of Britain in the next 10 days to try to prove his fitness for England's summer events.

The midfielder will play in Rangers' last game of the season at Hearts tomorrow and then travels to London to face Arsenal in Nigel Winterburn's testimonial on Tuesday. He is also due to appear at Torquay next Friday night in another benefit game as he attempts to show Glenn Hoddle that he is ready for England's friendly against South Africa on 24 May and the World Cup game in Poland. He could also go to France for the four-nation tournament at the start of June.

David Murray, the Rangers chairman, interrupted his club's championship celebrations to again refute suggestions Paul Ince is a transfer target. "There is no truth in these reports whatsoever," Murray said. "What is the point in paying a big fee for a player who is approaching 30 and then forking out high wages as well? In a year's time, Ince will be a free agent and then there might be a deal worth talking about."

Manchester City have sacked three members of their backroom staff, including their former player Colin Bell. The end of season clear-out at Maine Road gathered momentum yesterday when manager Frank Clark announced he was not giving a contract to Dalian Atkinson and said that virtually all the key members of his youth set-up would be leaving the club.

Neil McNab, the youth team coach, was sacked along with the youth development officers Terry Farrell and Bell. The move paves the way for the arrival of City's former captain, Paul Power, as director of the youth academy.

Steve Gritt, the Brighton manager who rescued the club from relegation to the GM Vauxhall Conference, is to stay at the club after five hours of talks with the new chairman, Dick Knight. Billy Bonds, the former West Ham manager, returned to management yesterday - admitting: "I have taken on one hell of a challenge." Bonds has agreed to become Millwall's third manager in barely three months following the departure of John Docherty last week.

Southampton have completed the signing of Chesterfield's Kevin Davies. The fee for the 20-year-old forward, whose hat-trick sank Bolton Wanderers in the FA Cup, will be decided by a transfer tribunal. Plans to regionalise the lower reaches of the Football League and bring in Conference clubs were shelved yesterday. After six hours of talks involving most of the 72 Nationwide League clubs, it became clear that there was no chance of the proposals gaining support. David Shephards, the League chairman, said: "We will not be proceeding with regionalisation."

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Schumacher on learning curve beside the sea



Michael Schumacher gets familiar with Monaco's palm-lined twists and turns yesterday in practice for Sunday's Grand Prix. Photograph: Allsport

Refereeing scandal rocks Brazil

An inquiry is being launched after a leading director of the Brazilian national soccer confederation (CBF) resigned amid allegations of corruption. A scandal erupted after the Globo television station played a recording of a telephone conversation which it said was between Ivans Mendes, head of the CBF's refereeing commission, and the president of Atletico Paranaense.

In the conversation, the man identified as Mendes offered to ask a referee to give Atletico a helping hand in a Copa Brazil match they were to play at home to Vasco da Gama.

The man identified as Mendes said: "I need you to send me 25,000 real (about

£15,000)... if I get a chance I will even ask the referee to give you a little bit of a hand."

"Tell your players to mark Edmundo [the Vasco da Gama striker] closely, he gets angry easily."

The man identified by Globo as Atletico's president, Mario Celso Petraglia, was heard to reply that Mendes should get in touch with his (Petraglia's) secretary who would "look after it."

Atletico won the second round, first leg match 3-1. Edmundo, who has a long record of being sent off, and the Atletico defender Andrei were dismissed in the first half for fighting. Edmundo said of his dismissal: "It was a huge injustice."

Globo television alleged that Mendes, who resigned on Wednesday claiming he had been threatened, is seeking election to the Brazilian Congress and used money sent to him by club directors to help his election campaign. Globo said it had sent the tape anonymously.

Mendes admitted he had received money but claimed it was all above board: "What is wrong with me as a Brazilian citizen who is trying to start a political career accepting help from my friends?" he said.

Petraglia denied he had spoken to Mendes about the game and the match referee, Oscar Roberto de Godoi, said there had been no approaches "even by phone".

Rowley threatens to bring Bosman problem to Britain

Rugby League
DAVE HADFIELD

Paul Rowley, the Halifax hooker, plans to become the first player in the game to challenge his contract under the Bosman Ruling.

Rowley intends to follow in the footsteps of Wimbledon's Vinnie Jones, the Welsh international footballer, in seeking to become a free agent under the terms of the groundbreaking European law, should they be applied - as both players believe they should - to domestic transfers.

The Halifax player, whose current contract expires in December, is angry that his club, who have rejected two bids for

him, have offered him a new contract which he regards as desisory.

Wigan have made a bid of £150,000 plus a player for the 22-year-old, who represented Great Britain Under-21s and England against France last year, and Leeds have also made a move for him.

"Halifax only paid £40,000 to Leigh for me and they have turned down two bids which are far more than their contract offer to me suggests they think I am worth," Rowley said. "I will continue to do my best for the club - and especially for our coach, John Pendlebury - this season, but at the end of it I want to move on as a free agent."

The current situation in rug-

by league is that a player at the end of a contract and rejecting a new deal can move to a different club for a fee to be fixed by a tribunal.

Where Rowley's case will ring alarm bells within the game is in his argument that he should be able to move on without a transfer fee.

The Halifax chief executive, Nigel Wood, said that any change to the current position "would send shock-waves through the game."

"The whole issue of contracts in professional sport is an evolving one, but we have been proceeding in accordance with the Rugby League's by-laws," he said. "We have made Paul an offer that would put him among the highest paid players at the club but, if he is unhappy with that in the light of what he believes he could be offered elsewhere, we have difficulties."

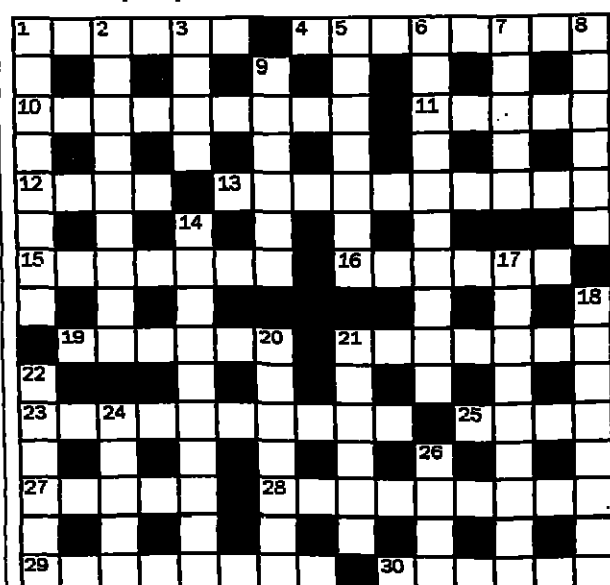
Wigan's extra man, page 29

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No 3294, Friday 9 May

By Phil

Thursday's solution



WANDERLUST
GRAFTSMAN
NEAT
ON THE COIN
RESIDUE
ABSENTEE
ELECTRIC
BARMAN
RECORDS
O W A D V N
ADMONISH
DEALER
RE
DISASTER
ESTES
EAS
CLUB
DASH
STATEMATE
G I O S E Y T
MEMBERSHIP

ACROSS

- 1 Chap who's crashed in Le Mans? (6)
- 4 Apply manure to best clothing? (3-5)
- 10 Thieving fellow enters building - anger follows (9)
- 11 River has a journey (5)
- 12 Ambassador residing in outskirts of Teddington subsequently (4)
- 13 Close watch from West and East? Yes, when that place is involved (7,3)
- 15 Fall sick in well surroundings, and fade away (4,3)
- 16 Lecture from young man about EC matter (6)
- 19 Cut back in church investigations (6)
- 21 Came by 'orse, by the sound of it, or some other animal (3,4)

DOWN

- 2 I'm flat out, honestly! (2,3,5)
- 25 Cost to hold the fair (4)
- 27 Feature of restaurant bill brought by the Parisian (5)
- 28 Crept slyly round Paradise for example (9)
- 29 Agent collecting art is upset - very thin quality (8)
- 30 English officer, diving into sea, came to water (6)

ACROSS

- 7 Run away from some Ravel opera (5)
- 8 Ice-cream: a type that's about to exist (6)
- 9 Part of delivery address for vehicle enemy held back (4,2)
- 14 Solve Times in error, without justification (10)
- 17 Like a public statement about English King's strain (9)
- 18 Fixed the location of gold that's observed, nothing less (8)
- 20 Observes plant container for plant disease (3-4)
- 21 Left-winger stifling cry of surprise was high (6)
- 22 Early form of life strangely formed of snot (6)
- 24 One snapped up a bone (5)
- 26 Chap carrying monarch to this place (4)

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Not your rank and file pint.



BREWED BY THE CHARLES WELLS FAMILY
BREWERY, BEDFORDSHIRE. EST. 1876.

Venice in peril

Police sealed the city of St Mark's and... men who had... vaporetto, freed... armoured person... dered the plot to... the Piazza, where... the bell tower, where... an flag and claimed... artists seeking... Venice from the... yoke of Rome.

Baird beef strategy

Tony Blair is working... strategy for lifting the... ban on British ship... which could be the... won from a... ship with British... partners.

Rome not amused

Rome is ruffled by... "triangle" with France... many.

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